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A return to civilian leadership: New Orleans 1865-1866

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A RETURN TO CIVILIAN LEADERSHIP: NEW ORLEANS, 1865-1866

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
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In

The Department of History

by

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It is just as true in politics as it is in any art or craft: new methods must drive out old ones. When a city can live in peace and quiet, no doubt the old-established ways are best: but when one is constantly being faced by new problems, one has also to be capable of approaching them in an original way.

Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*

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ABSTRACT

In the aftermath of the Civil War, southern cities such as New Orleans had to reconstitute local civilian government under extremely difficult circumstances. Different aspects of their physical infrastructure had been worn down and required revitalization. Sudden changes in the size and demographics of the population made social cohesion and provision of services more difficult and complicated. A depressed economy limited the financial resources available to government and business to confront the needs of growth. These recovery problems were common to all areas of the South, but in New Orleans they were greatly exacerbated by the city's unusually high population density and its special role in commerce. The new city government not only had to provide services and preserve safety, but civic leaders had to make themselves seem like legitimate and competent replacements. Outgoing Union authorities had to seem superfluous in their continued presence. This thesis seeks to know how fervently city leadership sought to meet these problems, and to what degree they succeeded. The main areas of focus are on transportation, public health, and public safety.

To investigate these matters I studied a range of primary and secondary sources. Letter books, contracts, and permits recorded by the City of New Orleans furnish a view of the city's official policies. New Orleans's diverse newspapers illustrate public perception of crisis management as it unfolded. Census bureau data grounds idiosyncratic observations of city life in statistical foundations. A wealth of photographic documentation of this period offers the look and feel of a great city in transition from a slave economy to the uncertainties of the new free labor society.

While the first civilian governments after the war did much to solve basic problems of industry, they failed to properly account for the substantial needs of their polity. Through shortsightedness and the uninspired maintenance of outmoded policies, city government failed the trust placed in it in 1865.

INTRODUCTION

THE PROBLEMS OF NEW ORLEANS RECONSTRUCTION

The destruction of southern plantation society at the end of the Civil War solved many conflicts that had plagued the nation in its formative years. The Union had decisively proved its military and political dominance over the sovereignty of states in a test of strength and endurance. The independent activities of former slaves had demonstrated the difficulty of maintaining or re-imposing traditional plantation discipline. Although the extent of their new rights as freedmen were in question, the emergence of a new African-American social force was becoming apparent. This vindication of abolitionists' hopes was accomplished both through valor in combat and the political consciousness to ally themselves with the dominant national political party. Industry had proved its utility for the national interest; and revealed the weaknesses of an agrarian economy. The reduction of planters' economic and political power opened minds to the promise of manufacture, which might take root in places of concentrated development. In 1865 the people of the former Confederacy realized that they had decisively lost the war, and that society would have to change in some ways to reflect a slave-less economy.¹

With these realizations came new questions about the South's future. The slaves were freed from old obligations to their masters, but it was unclear what obligations were owed to

¹ Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction, 1865-1877*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 45-46; Mark Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War, Union Military Policy Towards Southern Civilians, 1861-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 52-53, 56-57 Bitterness over the nature of the South's military defeat was as strong in Louisiana as in any state. Many former Confederates still fervently believed that their cause and policies had been just, but none could deny the ultimate failure of their arms. Neither political recalcitrance nor physical disobedience could negate the Federal government's *potential* to impose change militarily.

the Freedmen. In a nation where planters no longer took immediate financial interest in the wellbeing of their workers, who would ensure that they were properly cared for? For the first time Freedmen would have to rely on the same impoverished and patchy social welfare network upon which poor whites and immigrants had always depended. Black workers resisted the sort of contract labor that new state governments and the army tried to force upon them. Their freedom allowed the potential for travel, including exotic and exciting destinations far from the drudgery of the cane and cotton fields. Black workers were no longer tied to their owners, and did not necessarily stay attached to the land upon which they were raised. Merely temporary adventures could easily turn into permanent settlement, as the Freedmen had few or no belongings to tie them down. New Orleans had long been known as a center of black social mobility, and it now became a prime destination. City leaders wondered if there was a way of controlling or maintaining this new population's behavior, if the new social fabric should unravel.²

Although these transitions were common in the former slave states, the different approaches taken in the reconstruction of the various states made uniform policies and their enforcement virtually impossible. Black and white refugees could sometimes see real differences in society with as little as a day's travel. Many freedmen found this to be especially true of Southern cities such as New Orleans. Historically the area had boasted a large population of free blacks. Thousands of slaves and white refugees flocked to the relative freedom and safety of New Orleans after its early capture by the Union in 1862. Escape from stagnant plantation environments and rural violence was a powerful incentive. In addition there were the added attractions of commercial employment, public services, and a varied social life.

² Eric Foner, *Reconstruction, America's Unfinished Revolution 1863-1877*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 100-104.

Racial encounters and conflict played a major role in the strife of Reconstruction New Orleans, but this was far from the city's only difficulty in post-war recovery.³

Louisiana's secession from the Union opened the city up to the humiliating consequences of martial and political impotency. When Flag Officer David Farragut's Union fleet captured New Orleans in April 1862, the Confederacy was dealt a powerful blow. The Confederate states were without the benefit of New Orleans, their largest and most prosperous city, for the remainder of the Civil War. For the next three years the citizens of New Orleans lived under the rule of military occupation forces. This occupation force was commanded by a succession of officers whose goals were political and military rather than administrative. Emergency spending, corruption, and destruction left serious consequences for the future material well being of the city.

President Lincoln's preference that the federal government and the army dictate civic policy during the war itself was only a stopgap solution to the problems of urban governance. At some point government subsidies of food and money would taper off, and the troops would go home. It would be the duty of New Orleanians to assume responsibility for civic renewal and political dialogue. Even if the Federal government retained the power to overrule local policies for a time, the awesome task of providing leadership and vision rested with the natives. In 1865 the Freedmen's Bureau shouldered much of the burden for feeding and clothing impoverished whites and blacks, but this was not commonly seen as a suitable long-term support system. At some point refugees and unemployed poor of both races would have to find a new niche in free society. Both defeated Confederates and victorious Republicans hoped that the wheels of commerce would turn again to raise the workers from destitution. In order to

³ John W. Blassingame, *Black New Orleans 1860-1880*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), 2, 8-11, 16-17.

speed the process of social reconciliation, mayors Hugh Kennedy and John T. Monroe would somehow have to account for the nature of the new polity in their plans.⁴

New Orleans had become a large and prosperous city because of the volume and value of the goods traded there. All investments and hopes for the future lay with the transportation, distribution, and marketing of agricultural commodities. It was a city of merchants, transportation workers, and the people who catered to their needs. Very little was manufactured in the city because imported goods were so cheap. There were small iron foundries, but these were geared towards ship repair rather than ship construction. By 1860 the river traffic had swelled to 3,500 steamship dockings a year, with a cargo value of \$324,000,000. A banking industry had grown to support international trade, which by 1861 boasted a total capital of \$20,251,200. Without the constant flow of goods the city simply could not function normally. The disruption of this awesome trade by wartime blockades was terribly damaging to the interests of blue-collar workers as well as their merchant-class employers. When the war was over the city would try to recapture its trade, but it would only be possible if the city's essential transport and support systems functioned properly.⁵

Poor administration of municipal services and transportation infrastructure left much work to be done by returning civilian government in March 1865. Restoration of normal police authority was crucial in stabilizing the fabric of society. Disconnected railroad lines, sinking docks, and unhealthy streets were not acceptable for the people or for commerce. Management

⁴ Gaines M. Foster, "The Limitations of Federal Health Care for Freedmen, 1862-1868," *Journal of Southern History*, 48 (August 1982), 361, 363, 368.

⁵ Robert C Reinders, *End of an Era, New Orleans 1850-1860*, (New Orleans: The American Printing Co., 1964), 45, 201; Gerald M. Capers, *Occupied City, New Orleans Under the Federals 1862-1965*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), 1, 149; John Smith Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, Volume 1, (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1922), 1:241.

of the city's port, railroads, and public sanitation facilities comprised a crucial task for popular leadership. Failure in any one of these departments could spell either death or destitution for even the wealthiest citizens. Public health and safety concerns, transportation needs, and returned commercial capacity were significant gauges of civilian progress. These challenges are the focus of this thesis, which concentrates on the narrow duration of Presidential Reconstruction between the appointment of civilian leadership to City Hall in March of 1865 and the end of congressional elections in November of 1866. New Orleans had clear potential to succeed in the new free labor economy, but opportunities could not be squandered. Local political and business leaders had to re-assume their civic duties and restore the city's essential services to a fully functional and self-sufficient state.

President Johnson's unrealistically trustworthy attitude towards southern statesmen was put to the test as they sought to return their cities and states to the embrace of the Union. It was the Southern states' chance to prove their ability to govern themselves equitably without Congressional supervision. Unfortunately the primary goal of most franchised southerners was to restore home rule on traditional white bourgeois terms. Power would largely be consolidated and used for the benefit of the planter and investor classes. Unwillingness to grant full benefits of citizenship to blacks prevented the small but significant changes to public administration that could have made modern urban life more prosperous and democratic for all citizens.

The record of New Orleans local leadership at that time supports two of Dan T. Carter's arguments about early Presidential Reconstruction governments. When whites did not fear the erosion of their political power they largely ignored the vital needs of blacks and the impoverished. Southerners recognized that Northerners paid attention to civil rights, which generally prevented overt official acts of hostility. The more subtle slights of neglect or

isolation could be just as harmful. Openness to the possibilities of economic progress through modernization and the keen use of investment capital represent important virtues in an otherwise oppressive regime. Presidential Reconstruction demonstrated the futility in expecting southern governments to embrace generous new standards of civil rights without compulsion from higher authorities.⁶

⁶ Dan T. Carter, *When the War Was Over, The Failure of Self-Reconstruction in the South, 1865-1867*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 3-4, 30, 63, 94, 108, 126; Kenneth M Stampp., Leon F. Litwack, ed. *Reconstruction, An Anthology of Revisionist Writings*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), 23, 59, 73; Patrick W. Riddleberger, *1866, The Critical Year Revisited*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979), 2-12, 17, 53.

CHAPTER 1

THE REVIVAL OF TRANSPORTATION

When Louisiana seceded from the Union in 1861, the people of New Orleans had every reason to believe that they would be safe from capture. There were some militia veterans from the 1815 Battle of New Orleans still living, and their confidence was infectious. Several paths of Union attack were possible, but all of them were treacherous for invaders. Lake Pontchartrain to the North was too shallow for oceangoing vessels and a fortress guarded against the entry of smaller craft. Attack from upriver on the Mississippi was precluded by the Confederate garrisons at Vicksburg and Port Hudson. A Confederate garrison at Mobile, Alabama, prevented encirclement from the Gulf. A land attack from the east required crossing vast swamps, which would leave invaders vulnerable and disorganized. The last possibility was an attack right up the Mississippi River, which was guarded by two fortresses and a large wooden boom across the channel. Geographical advantages gave planners a false sense of security that led to inadequate preparations. Only a small, under-equipped force of soldiers was left to defend the city while the most useful units were sent to fight in Virginia. No coherent official plans were made for the defense or evacuation of the city.⁷

The people of the city never realized how vulnerable they really were. The Union's large warships seriously outgunned the Confederate river forts. When Flag Officer David Farragut and General Benjamin F. Butler started up the Mississippi, it was only a matter of time

⁷ Reinders, 45, 201; Capers, 1,149; Kendall, 241.

before they captured the city. The Army of the Gulf sought it as a center of future operations as well as a goal in itself.⁸

The population of New Orleans panicked when it heard of the enemy fleet's approach in April, 1862. Slave owners feared that there would be a general slave uprising. City slaves, who had always enjoyed greater license than their plantation counterparts, reveled in the prospect of their potential freedom. Although it was not yet the official policy of the federal government to free slaves, the slaves had believed Democratic propaganda from the election of 1860. It was commonly thought that the Republicans were abolitionists, despite all protests to the contrary.⁹

The Confederate Army immediately seized control of the city's railroads and large steamships for evacuation. All Confederate troops, documents, and military supplies were spirited away while civilians begged to be defended. The banks of the city sent away \$6,000,000 in gold specie. Jefferson Davis telegraphed orders to destroy all stores of cotton and tobacco regardless of ownership. Great bonfires were set on the levees, and many private citizens added their own goods to the fire. Every ship that was not sent upriver with the army was set ablaze and released downstream to slow the enemy's approach. Many of the large wooden piers on the waterfront were either towed into the channel and sunk or burned in place. Much of the industrial machinery along the dockyards was destroyed or sunk in the river. Thousands of rioters and looters added chaos and violence to the systematic destruction.

⁸ Capers, 28-35; Kendall, 236-245, 274-275.

⁹ Stampp, 30-35.

Before the Union army even set foot in New Orleans, the resources available to them were greatly diminished.¹⁰

The city's chaotic material disposition was compounded by an arcane power structure. The political climate that awaited Union soldiers had been explosive long before the election of 1860, and the excitement of Confederate rebellion had only inflamed preexisting tendencies toward radicalism. Mayor John T. Monroe originally controlled New Orleans through a very powerful, entrenched political machine. The origins of this hegemony predated the secession crisis and help explain his difficult relationship with General Butler and Union authority.

There was a violent political struggle between Democrats and nativists known as Know Nothings during the 1850s. Immigrant Irish and Germans tended to side with native Creoles against the Anglo-Americans who arrived after the Louisiana Purchase. This antagonism boiled over into riots during the state election of 1855, when 1,000 immigrant votes were burned and hundreds were beaten. In the city election of 1856 the Know Nothings succeeded again in shutting Democrats and immigrants out of most important municipal offices.¹¹

In the weeks leading up to the city election of 1858 there was much anxiety that such atrocities might be attempted again in order to keep Democrats out of City Hall. Shortly before the election, an independent party was formed nominating Major P. G. T. Beauregard for mayor in the absence of an officially sanctioned Democratic nomination procedure. Beauregard's partisans raised a large citizen militia that seized military control of the city north of Canal Street during election week to protect voters' rights. This "Vigilance Committee" was organized and led by common immigrants who made up for their lack of military discipline

¹⁰ Edward Larocque Tinker, *Creole City, Its Past and Its People*, (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1953), 74-79; Kendall, 259-263; Capers 44-47.

¹¹ Kendall, 210-212

with an excess of armaments. Well over 1,000 militiamen sprang up seemingly overnight, having successfully concealed the conspiracy. Veterans from previous American wars and guerilla conflicts of Nicaragua threatened to raise their own army to destroy the uprising. Although the situation was extraordinarily extralegal and dangerous, the United States Army mysteriously declined to intervene and the regular police force was powerless to resist. Armed patrols were involved in shootings, but outright war was avoided by the caution of the mayor. The election was held as planned, and the Know Nothing candidate Gerard Stith miraculously won by a very narrow margin. Beauregard accepted the official outcome of the election, and the Vigilance Committee melted away having killed only a handful of people. The next two years were spent consolidating rigid control over city politics so that such threats might never arise again. This control was partially exercised through voter registration fraud, but mostly by hard-handed police intimidation.¹²

John T. Monroe was the clear heir to this dubious legacy as the Native American (Know Nothing) mayoral candidate in 1860. He was a blood relative of President Monroe. Although he was born in Virginia and raised in St. Louis, John T. Monroe arrived in New Orleans before the age of 21. He learned to manipulate the masses while stevedoring along the levees and gained recognition as a labor leader. The electoral contest was so uncompetitive that his Independent opponent spent much of the campaign in France. Monroe won by a wide margin,

¹² Kendall, 213-224, Stith received 3,581 votes against Beauregard's 3,450. Despite the real threat of civil war within the city there were still reports of voter fraud in several districts on both sides.



Fig. 1: New Orleans Panorama. Source: Bachmann, John. c1851. Bird's Eye View of New Orleans / drawn from nature on stone. Library of Congress Panoramic Maps 1847-1929. [Online] Available <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/ppmsca.08888>; ppmsca08888. [March 22, 2006]



Fig. 2 : City Hall. City Hall was located on St. Charles Street across from Lafayette Square. Mayor Monroe and Pierre Soulé officially yielded the city to Union forces here in 1862. This building was the seat of city government through the Civil War and Reconstruction. Louisiana Governors Hahn and Wells also kept offices here in 1864 and 1865. Source: *George Francois Mugnier Photograph Collection, Louisiana Division, New Orleans Public Library, Ca 1880-1910.*

with especially strong help from the dockworkers. As the state turned towards secession, he enthusiastically switched his loyalties to the Democratic Party's national agenda.¹³

When General Butler arrived in New Orleans his original intention was to govern with the assistance of local authorities. The ambitious generals of both armies aspired to become the next Napoleon through brilliant victories in combat, and cared little for the thankless tasks of garrison duty. Butler had received much verbal abuse from the masses and Mayor John T. Monroe, but he demonstrated unusual restraint in allowing elected officials to retain their offices. Monroe and his political allies behaved as though their militant, uncompromising habits from the 1850s would bear them through the new crisis, and they only paid lip service to the army's demands. After all, they had outlasted armed intimidation before, so the vocal support of the masses might pull them through once again. If an army could materialize overnight in 1858, then there may have been hope that the feat could be repeated in 1862. Stalling, complaining, and passive acts of sabotage characterized Monroe's response to Army demands. He was not a man familiar with humility or compromise. Butler's patience with Monroe's naïve obstinacy was short lived, and in May of 1862 the entire municipal government was replaced with army staff officers.¹⁴

Securing effective rule over New Orleans itself was important, but the occupation was just a means to an end. Other pressing military activities enhanced Union war fighting more directly. The New Orleans and Opelousas Railroad was confiscated by the military for food importation and strategic uses. The southern end of the New Orleans and Jacksonville Railroad

¹³ Kendall, 228-233

¹⁴ Elizabeth Joan Doyle, "Civilian Life in Occupied New Orleans, 1862-1865," (Doctoral dissertation., Louisiana State University, 1955) 63-65; Kendall, 278-287, Mayor Monroe was held in prison at Ship Island and Fort Pickens from the time of his removal until the summer of 1865, when he was released by President Johnson. ; Capers, 64-65; Grimsley, 52-54

was used by Union armies, while the northern end was maintained by its original board of directors for profit within the Confederacy. Neither railroad consulted with the city about management, even though New Orleans owned a controlling interest in both companies. The railroads would provide indispensable military service for the remainder of the war.¹⁵

In May and June of 1862 General Butler received worldwide condemnation for his “woman codes” in suppression of Confederate spirit. Order number 28 was intended to improve morale among Union troops and instill respect in civilians. The “women codes” called for the arrest and imprisonment of any woman who demonstrated distaste for the United States’ flag or soldiers. Women crossing the street in the presence of soldiers, spitting at soldiers, laughing at soldiers, or failing to curtsy for soldiers were punished. The wearing of Confederate insignia or painting of General Butler’s likeness on chamber pots was also forbidden. These unrepentant women who violated the rules were placed in cells with the lowest of prostitutes, regardless of their ordinary social status. Although overnight detention in Parish Prison and a fine of \$5 was not an uncommon penalty for minor offenses, the dangerous conditions there were highly objectionable to women of the middle class. Once people learned that Butler’s new rules were to actually be enforced, very few publicly committed the offenses.¹⁶

Butler’s new requirements had political goals, but the new code of conduct had some objective dividends for life across the social spectrum. Many newcomers to the city had come from rural areas where it was normal to dispose of all kinds of refuse near dwellings. New

¹⁵ Capers, 84-89; Kendall, 277; Doyle, 64.

¹⁶ Kendall, 293-295; Capers, 112-118, the Parliaments of England and France angrily censured the United States government for allowing “gentlewomen” to be treated in this way. President Lincoln’s fear of a British-Confederate alliance may have prompted Butler’s removal, rather than any concern for the people of New Orleans. The women’s codes also provided powerful propaganda to the rest of the Confederacy to keep up the fight, lest their own freedom of expression be similarly limited.

Orleanians seldom enforced rules about waste disposal, so people never changed their habits. Butler took the harsh enforcement policies regarding political speech and applied them to his sanitation codes. Women tended to perform housekeeping duties, and if they failed to properly dispose of waste, then they would suffer imprisonment. Nothing short of this extremity could induce some people to maintain orderly surroundings.¹⁷

On December 15, 1862 General Banks replaced Butler as commander of Gulf Department forces and set a different tone for public relations. The army relaxed its posture towards the city somewhat, but mismanagement and corruption grew. Where Butler had maintained medical quarantines for a full forty days, Banks shortened it for convenience and ease of enforcement. Banks had ambitious plans to conquer the upper part of the state, and he did not have the time to focus on daily operations of city bureaus. In the next two years five different Union officers acted as Mayor of New Orleans. Their inconsistent business policies compounded the city's difficulties.¹⁸

In 1863 and 1864 unsound monetary policy by city authorities caused the rapid devaluation of small bills. New paper currency of less than ten dollars face value was necessary to replace scarce Union bills and incredibly inflated Confederate bills. Banks blamed New Orleans businesses for exacerbating inflation and suspected them of aiding the Confederacy. City businesses issued their own small bills, known as "shinplasters." The small blue tickets of the New Orleans City Railroad became the most valuable bills in town. Counterfeiting of streetcar tickets became rampant, but General Banks forbade the blue tickets' repudiation. The streetcar company sold fewer authentic tickets because fraudulent ones were so plentiful.

¹⁷ Jo Ann Carrigan, *The Saffron Scourge: A History of Yellow Fever in Louisiana, 1796-1905*, (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, 1994), 86-89, 213.

¹⁸ Kendall, 293-295; Capers, 112-118.

Banks forced the railroad to accept extended losses through the continued acceptance of these inauthentic documents.

In connection with the monetary crisis Banks also attempted to liquidate the largest banks in New Orleans. The banks and city government had money invested in all of the city's commercial enterprises. When General Banks returned to Washington to speak with the President about reorganizing a loyal Louisiana, General Stephen A. Hurlbut took temporary command. General Hurlbut rescinded Banks's liquidation proceedings, recognizing that the railroads and banks were sound. There was no organized plan by New Orleans business to overthrow the occupation authority or cheat investors. Banks's actions intentionally harmed the local railroads' profitability in a difficult business climate. Aggressively undermining the banks threatened everyone whose investments were maintained there, including many stockholders in the local economy. Businessmen across the South would soon be traveling North and to Europe for investment capital. Investors after the war would find the South to be an interesting prospect, but it was very hard to secure commitments when ownership and management of the main assets was in dispute.¹⁹

In March of 1865 the new Louisiana state government that Lincoln had set into motion sought to reassert its right to congressional representation. From the city's capture in 1862 Lincoln had sought to establish a loyal Louisiana government as quickly and painlessly as possible. Towards this end, military authorities organized a state constitutional convention for unionists in 1864. The convention was dominated by the white working class, who despised slavery but feared political and economic competition from black labor. Slavery was abolished and the duration of the working week was regulated, but the franchise was not extended to

¹⁹ Capers, 151-161; Doyle 175-178.

freedmen. Subsequent elections in 1864 rewarded local party leaders who had led the successful convention. This caused a fair amount of turnover in 1865 as politicians left state office to seek the greater power that lay with a seat in Congress. Lincoln could not guarantee that Congress would respect their credentials, but he would personally acknowledge these representatives as a loyal “tangible nucleus” for restoration of relations between the states. Governor Michael Hahn resigned his position in order to seek a seat in the U.S. Senate. Congress refused to seat Hahn or any other representatives elected under the new state constitution of 1864. Many congressional Republicans wanted greater acceptance of black suffrage, which most white loyalists of Louisiana were unwilling to accept. The sudden reshuffling of political personalities left much uncertainty over who would lead New Orleans, and how much freedom of action they would enjoy to solve problems creatively.²⁰

Lieutenant Governor Madison Wells replaced Hahn as Governor and appointed Dr. Hugh Kennedy Mayor of New Orleans. Kennedy had lived in New Orleans for thirty years as a Vieux Carré district druggist. General Hurlburt, commander of the army of occupation, approved of the arrangement. Acting Mayor Captain Steven Hoyt was reassigned to other military duties. Kennedy’s first task was to reduce the city’s bloated budget. To this end he reduced the salary of almost every city employee, including himself. The cost of the Mayor’s office alone was reduced from almost \$10,000 a year to \$5,000 after stipends for “carriage

²⁰ Stamp 40-48; Foner, 60-65; Enough Louisiana voters had taken the loyalty oath by the middle of 1864 to elect full slates of state officers. Under Lincoln’s 10% plan, if 10% of the people who had voted in the election of 1860 took a loyalty oath, then they could participate in the election of loyal unionist state government. Lincoln’s pocket veto of the Wade-Davis bill for Reconstruction provoked Congress to disregard his 10% plans. Congressional rejection of Louisiana’s delegation was done to pressure Lincoln into letting Congress manage captured lands as something other than conventionally organized states.

hire” and “secret police” were eliminated. The Board of Education, Police Department, Coroner’s Office, and other special bureaus were similarly economized.²¹

Once Kennedy had city costs under control, he sought to increase revenue. Paying off the city’s debts would strengthen the community, but the people already suffered too much to raise taxes again. Raising taxes on many local businesses would also be counterproductive, since the city owned such a large amount of stock in the companies. In the 1850s New Orleans had purchased \$4,000,000 in the New Orleans, Jackson and Great Northern Railroad. The city owned \$3,000,000 in bonds of the New Orleans, Opelousas and Great Western Railroads. This was a large sum of money for a state at that time, let alone a city. That amount of money could easily fund Georgia’s typical budget for a few years, in comparison. Both railroads were given special rights of way, wharf space on the river, and ferry privileges. Other city transportation interests included the New Orleans and Pontchartrain Railroad, the New Orleans and Carrollton Railroad, and the New Orleans City Railroad. Few of these companies were crucial by themselves, but together they formed a powerful and useful conduit for trade and for people. These railroads had been badly maintained during the war and required refinancing and repair. Revenue could be generated from a railroad revival, and increased commerce in general would benefit the economy.²²

²¹ Kendall, 295-296; New Orleans Office of the Mayor, *Permits Issued by Acting Military Mayor*, (City Archives AA670, New Orleans Public Library, 1864), 12, 369, 415, 461, 538, 607, 676, 723, 852; *New Orleans Picayune*, March 22, 1865; Paul H. Bergeron, ed., *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, Vol. 9, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press 1967-1996), 446, This lengthy letter from Hugh Kennedy was mailed from City Hall on July 21 1865. In between relating economic concerns he complains that Col. Hamlin, son of the ex-Vice President, has been allowing his black garrison to intimidate whites at Port Hudson.

²² Kendall, 225-230; Reinders, 46-47; Peter Wallenstein, *From Slave South to New South, Public Policy in Nineteenth-Century Georgia*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 64, 68, 74, 112-113.

Economic studies in the 1850's indicated that many Orleans area businessmen were aware of the railroads' importance to the city economy. They saw how Boston, New York, and Philadelphia had come to dominate their regions economically through the use of quick, reliable, and inexpensive transportation. Some dared to dream that New Orleans might dominate Texas and the West in the way that New York had come to command the Great Lakes regional economy. Many thought that other things being equal, the city with more railroad and canal feeders would grow faster. Parish and city governments played a pivotal role in railroad financing from the start because of the need to distribute risk over a broad base and the potential for profits to subsidize a lower future tax rate. Peter Wallenstein's study of ante-bellum Georgia shows that this theory had proven highly effective when implemented at the state level. It was one of the few areas where rural parishes found common cause with New Orleans, since plantation lands increased in value with proximity to railroad tracks. Initial expenses could be extremely high, but patient businessmen saw huge profits before long.²³

In order to release the Opelousas Railroad from military control, Mayor Kennedy had to assert the city's rights as stockholder in the summer of 1865. Petitions were sent to the recently elevated President Andrew Johnson and General Canby for the release of the company. General Canby and the Quartermaster General replied that they would only return the railroad if the owners would agree to reimburse *all* costs incurred during the course of its military service. The company had not made a profit since 1861, and three years of maintenance costs could ruin the venture. The railroad also had serious accidents in the course of transporting troops, which had damaged engines and rolling stock. Negotiations were slow and difficult

²³ Buckner H. Payne, *Report of the Algiers and Opelousas Railroad*, (New Orleans: Office of the Picayune, 1851), 8-18, 21; Richard Swainson Fisher, M.D., *A New and Complete Statistical Gazetteer of the United States of America*, (New York: J. H. Colton, 1853), 396-399, 557, 957; Wallenstein, 12, 23-25, 59.

because of Johnson's distance from New Orleans. Johnson was unfamiliar with the particulars of the case and relied on advisors. Much of his information came from recent acquaintances who tried to mislead him for political gain. Former Confederates and their sympathizers played to his vanity in an effort to regain local control. Outraged Republicans felt that Johnson had betrayed and misled his former congressional allies. Johnson's lenient treatment of former rebels led stalwart Republicans to try to subvert his policies. When Johnson proved too eager to pardon former rebels (such as former Mayor Monroe), generals and congressmen did what they could to maintain federal control through administrative and procedural means. Johnson was sufficiently insulated from local southern politics that it was possible for dishonest men to dupe him with propaganda or outright lies. Even when Johnson was well apprised of matters he cared little for instigating social reform or intervening in state affairs when most congressional observers deemed it necessary.²⁴

General Canby's reluctance to return the railroad to New Orleans management was not merely out of concern for the army's budget. The military authorities in Louisiana retained the power to confiscate property that had benefited the Confederacy. New Orleans' early return to Union control did not lend it any special consideration. Years of local resentment and insolence towards occupation forces had embittered many generals in control of seized city property. These generals did not particularly care if city infrastructure was restored to public service or not, as long as all former rebels were deprived of executive functions. General Philip H. Sheridan candidly admitted his perceptions in a letter to President Johnson in November of 1865:

²⁴ Bergeron, 9:374 This letter from Governor J. Madison Wells was written from New Orleans on November 11, 1865. 8:499 Letter from Hugh Kennedy mailed on July 29, 1865. 8:532-533 Letter from Hugh Kennedy on August 2, 1865. 8:661 Letter from Hugh Kennedy on August 26, 1865; *The New York Times*, March 18, 1865; Stamp, 50-79.

There are without doubt many malcontents in the State of Louisiana and much bitterness, but this bitterness is all that is left for these people, there is no power of resistance left, the Country is impoverished and the probability is that in two or three years there will be almost a total transfer of landed property, the North will own every Railroad, every Steamboat, every large mercantile establishment and everything which requires capital to carry it on; in fact Mr. President I consider the South now Northernized.²⁵

As far as Canby was concerned, the railroad owners deserved to be charged the costs of Union transportation because they had started the war. This may have been what President Johnson had in mind when he famously spoke of impoverishing traitors. Asking anything less was letting the rebels off too easily. Though Johnson did grant leniency in many cases, his subordinates were sometimes more consistent. It was true that Kennedy's sympathies had been with the Confederacy, but there was nothing unpatriotic in his attempt to recover his city's necessary assets. From the start of the secession crisis Kennedy had been an outspoken Irish-American Democrat, but his concern for his city was not entirely political. New Orleans was attempting to engage in its essential business of transportation, just as plantation owners were trying to replant cotton and sugar. The city had a legal claim to exploit, but which contracts would be honored from before the war was an open question. After extended negotiations, the New Orleans and Opelousas Railroad was returned to the city in January of 1866. The stockholders ultimately agreed to pay for new rolling stock in exchange for the army dropping its other claims. Conflict resolutions like these required a true adversarial relationship in order for both sides' interests to be fairly represented. It was an area where city leaders fulfilled their obligations in Presidential Reconstruction.²⁶

²⁵ Bergeron, 2:433 This letter from Philip Sheridan mailed on November 26, 1865 is marked "Personal" at the top.

²⁶ "General Banks Letter Copybook," (Louisiana & Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU), January 16, 1864; "George Leonard Andrews Papers", (Louisiana & Lower Mississippi Valley

The New Orleans and Jackson Railroad was a more material problem for Kennedy to solve. There was less need for lawyers and greater demand upon the resourcefulness of engineers and administrators. The Union army operated the lower end of the tracks near the city for most of the war. The upper portion of the railroad near Jackson, Mississippi, was still run by the old board of Directors. By the end of the war some of these directors were foreign citizens, deceased, or in exile. The railroad in Mississippi had made money, but most of its equipment was in terrible condition. Kennedy held an election for a new Board of Directors with the advice and consent of President Johnson. It was arranged so as to exclude the most objectionable wartime profiteers but allow maximum stockholder participation. Regaining stockholder control allowed the expensive and difficult work of rebuilding to begin.²⁷

Former Confederate General P. G. T. Beauregard was selected by the new Boards of Directors to manage reconstruction of the New Orleans and Jackson Railroad. Beauregard was nationally known as a war hero, but his roots as a leader of the community ran much deeper. Kennedy probably did not nominate Beauregard purely out of loyalty to the Confederate cause. He wanted a local man he knew he could trust with the city's investment. Beauregard was still remembered in the Creole community from the 1858 mayoral election. He did not know a great deal about railroads when he was hired, but he diligently studied his new trade throughout late 1865 and 1866. After he had learned something of the industry He purchased a long-term lease to operate the New Orleans and Carrollton Railroad. Beauregard was not merely a titular head of the company, as he took an active interest in costs and methods of construction.

Nevertheless, some in the city took umbrage that an unelected mayor could exercise the city's

Collections, LSU), These letters refer to attitudes and living conditions in New Orleans, and provide perspective for Sheridan's impressions of bitterness; Stampp, 56.

²⁷ Bergeron, 8:443-448 Letter from Hugh Kennedy sent July 21, 1865, Kendall, 298-299.

vote as a stockholder. The alternative to Kennedy's choice, however, would have been more objectionable to the community and worrisome for the city. If Kennedy had not been appointed to replace Acting Mayor Hoyt, then the army would have voted the city's shares in local railroad companies. The board needed to be run by people with enduring interest in the local economy. Some military governors of the South were breaking up Southern interests to gain the favor of Northern politicians. There was a popular desire to see former rebels suffer for their treason that was not being satisfied by President Johnson's lenient policies. Given the military's propensity for liquidating city assets, New Orleans could have lost its great investments.²⁸

Establishing an efficient normal pace of business operations was a task that really required the insight of experienced locals such as Beauregard. Even if military authorities had the noblest of intentions during their stay in power, their perceptions of what was typical for New Orleans business and society could not help but suffer from their limited experience. Compared to the virtual stoppage of trade when the city was captured in 1862, practically any improvement might seem like a bustling business. Seemingly superfluous assets or capacity during a bust could be absolutely necessary when trade was bustling. Some officers came from busy cities such as Boston or New York, but few of them had previous direct experience in mercantile exchange. These problems of perception were an important reason why locals needed to be involved in the city's long-term business decisions instead of new arrivals and temporary residents.

²⁸ New Orleans Daily Crescent, February 14, 1866; "P. G. T. Beauregard and Family Papers", (Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU), Sept. 22, 1865 letter, contract with N.O. and Carrollton Railroad.

As New Orleans grew in population and size, it expanded along the available high ground first, in order to avoid as much back-swamp flooding as possible. Railroads extending from the city center traced these tracts, and as the city matured around these trunks some of the short distance routes became extensions of the local streetcar and freight networks. The six-mile Carrollton and Pontchartrain routes to the north and west exemplify this practice. The limited amount of drained space available for commercial and residential expansion demanded that the land be utilized to its maximum potential. Between the river, swamp, and lake there was little room for sprawl or waste. For sixty years after the Civil War the optimization of rail access and service for both passengers and cargo would be an important goal. Receiving control of precious transportation right-of-ways was understood to be a tremendous public responsibility as well as a business opportunity. There was an understanding that access providers owed a debt to the people who permitted their operation. In addition to this, the growing complexity of port functions would require better planning in the years to come to function efficiently. Business planners were beginning to realize these challenges as they sought to rebuild their systems.²⁹

The railroad Directors sent Beauregard to Baltimore, Liverpool, Glasgow, and London in late 1865 to negotiate new terms with investors and obtain industrial materials. Upon his return there was a flurry of activity to revitalize the city's vital corridors of commerce. Worn out passenger cars were repaired or replaced for the service of the city, but compromises had to be made in the process. In order to simplify operations and reduce expenses, steam engine

²⁹ Robert L. Dupont, "Progressive Civic Development and Political Conflict: Regular Democrats and Reformers in New Orleans, 1896-1912," (Doctoral dissertation. Louisiana State University, 1999), 221-222, 234-249

service was reduced in favor of horse-power. Crowded New Orleans residents were grateful for improved accommodations:

We are glad to see that the cars have been placed on the railroad tracks on Carondelet and St. Charles streets, and were yesterday in full operation. The cars are large, airy, and well ventilated, ... They are considerably heavier than the other cars in use by our City Railway Companies, and we discovered that it was with great difficulty the mules could move them beyond a walk.³⁰

Not everyone was content with this change of service. Many of the city's poor and unemployed recognized that these improvements could only take place through government assistance. While city charities needed everything they could get, the railroads remained lightly taxed and regulated. Large corporate orders for durable goods also brought home how dependant New Orleans was on trade. The city was not accustomed to providing finished goods for itself. Many artisans were outraged at their leaders' lack of faith in the local working class to manufacture goods:

We are greatly concerned to see the new administration of the Carrolton Railroad remitting cotton money to employ the mechanics of Philadelphia, when there must be men competent to execute this simplest of operations in our own city. . . .

Would it not be better to keep the cost of these sixty cars, amounting perhaps to twice sixty thousand dollars, to pay taxes, feed the women and children, and reward the labor of New Orleans?³¹

Beauregard's announced switch from small steam engines, or "dummies", to horses on the Carrolton Route met with mixed responses. The dummies had been announced with great fanfare in 1860, and it had been promised that horse-drawn streetcars would be phased out. With this sudden change of policy the wind would no longer blow through the hot cars so briskly, and travel on local routes would take longer. More optimistic locals heralded a return to the more bucolic days of New Orleans' past. The city aldermen rationalized the change as a

³⁰ *New Orleans Bee*, July 30, 1866.

³¹ *Southern Star*, April 12, 1866.

method of reducing noise to neighbors of the rail lines. This “spin” was somewhat transparent as an attempt to preserve pride in the face of retrenchment. Mechanical advantage could also be put to better use on the Jackson Railroad, which carried heavier freight for longer distances.³²

The changing technologies of transportation allowed for new solutions to social problems. Larger passenger vehicles had a big effect on how companies and municipalities handled segregation. These spacious conveyances were designed for small steam engines, but could be pulled by horses in a pinch. Older, smaller cars were more appropriate for the mule teams that had been used frequently since the war. Running a small trolley for blacks and a small trolley for whites made it clear where social boundaries lay. Working class whites realized that blacks required the service for commuting, but sought to maintain a distinction in social standing. This was satisfying for conservatives, but expensive for the transit companies, since they had twice as many machines and animals to maintain for the same ridership. Larger cars opened up greater potential for segregation within cars, possibly saving costs and increasing profitability while improving rider conditions. The dramatic increase in black residents depicted in the Appendix (page 63) suggests what a powerful market force they could potentially become. Profit mattered greatly to most businesses, and no sensible company could marginalize a quarter of the marketplace without some serious consideration. Unfortunately for the black population, managers preferred to satisfy their peers’ social preferences rather than enrich themselves and their companies.³³

³² John Fredrick Nau, *The German People of New Orleans, 1850-1900*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958), 6, 22-23; *New Orleans Bee*, April 12, 27, May 9, September 1, 1866; Kendall, 224-231, 289-299; *New Orleans Southern Star*, April 8, 1866.

³³ Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South 1865-1890*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978)184-195.



Fig. 3. Canal Street. Canal Street was a main thoroughfare for all kinds of transportation. It was also the traditional dividing line between the American and Creole parts of town. Source: *Stereographs, Louisiana Photograph Collection, New Orleans Public Library, Ca 1865-1925*



Fig. 4. St. Charles Street. St. Charles Street provided streetcar service through the business district. It was not uncommon for narrow roads to boast parallel sets of track. Track installation frequently came with hard pavement or improved drainage gutters. Wealthier residential and commercial districts tended to be well serviced. Source: *Mugnier Photograph Collection, NOPL.*

In the early months of the railroad recovery from June 1865 to March of 1866, allegations of incompetence emerged. The rebuilding of city wharves necessitated the importation of heavy timbers, each sixty feet long. The depth of the river, speed of the current, and stickiness of river bottom called for the use of massive pilings. Large quantities of lumber waited at New Orleans and Jackson Railroad depots, but was never collected by the Railroad company. The scheduled trains simply passed with different cargos in tow. It was difficult for observers to determine whether or not there was responsible leadership after all. On April 26, 1866, a train exploded seventy miles from the city because the conductor was poorly trained for his assignment. Beauregard and the administrators of the railroad explained to the public that this was an unavoidable consequence of wartime recovery. The damage to tracks and rolling stock was so extensive that the trains were spending all their time on repair details. Massive timbers could not be hauled because the special rolling stock for their transport was not available.

The port could not be properly rebuilt without supplies, so prioritizing company tasks was important. People were eager for business to return to normality and demand was already exceeding capacity. Calls for faster progress were rewarded with measurable success. By May of 1866 the New Orleans and Jackson Railroad could offer popular excursion rides to Magnolia, Mississippi. Rolling stock had been replaced, tracks had been repaired, and the rebuilding was finished by May of 1867. By that time the Railroad was returning a projected dividend of 14% from increased freight business. This was a stunning turnaround to anyone

who had seen the city starve at the height of the wartime blockade. It seemed as though new management was equal to the task before them, despite fears to the contrary.³⁴

The main arteries through the city were vital for commerce, but the smaller railroads through the city held great social importance. Cities are not completely built according to the rules of efficiency, and people formed personal attachments to the features of their neighborhood. Over the years the people of New Orleans had incorporated local streetcars into the fabric of society. After the Civil War the sight of repaired and repainted streetcars brought a sense of pride to those who saw them. The observance of religious rites such as All Saints Day required the entire Catholic population to decorate cemeteries on the far side of town. Streetcars were the conveyance of choice for such occasions, and they were always crowded. Tourists and visiting businessmen observed the city without soiling their shoes in a march through the filthy streets. People rode the streetcar on “suburban excursions” to drink and frolic at Lake Pontchartrain. Diverse immigrants of the city got to know each other better through these communal experiences. Hopeful citizens could see the city expanding into the swamp and reflect on their city’s progress. These were the kinds of festivities that sometimes gave people hope that the races could come together, as they used to during celebrations of the Battle of New Orleans. Both black and white veterans had once bonded together, and there was hope that this would transpire again one day.³⁵

Mayor Kennedy and his aldermen appreciated the importance of streetcars in fostering a sense of place as well as providing jobs. Kennedy and his elected successor, John T. Monroe, sought to expand the number of service routes in a return to successful ante-bellum city

³⁴ *Southern Star*, April 10, 1866; *Daily Crescent*, January 10, March 26, April 11, 1866; *New Orleans Bee*, May 15, April 26, 1866.

³⁵ Blassingame, 9, 13, 17.

planning. This was a somewhat democratic process where the people could directly involve themselves in the shape of their city. Nobody had any power over President Johnson or Congress at the time, but they could express themselves expansively at planning forums. Unlike many cities New Orleans was not so segregated residentially that blacks could not enjoy some of the same routes.

The social significance of the planning process could produce a destructive impulse as well as creative ones. The city fathers demanded that the Union garrison's brand-new railroad tracks be removed in early 1866. The supply line spur had just been finished less than a year before, but its presence symbolized a defeat that people wanted to put behind them. The army supply tracks had been built for free by the War Department, but they represented a projection of alien authority into the heart of the community. There had been no hearings before the board of Aldermen about the spur's necessity. There had been no letters to the editor about its appropriateness for the neighborhood. It existed by the incontrovertible will of Federal bureaucracy that many were trying to slough off. The use of the tracks was evidently not worth the specter of military reinforcement, and they were removed.³⁶

Although streetcars had won over a majority of the city, some people disagreed with the city's improvement policy. Mayor Kennedy had passed a resolution through the board of Aldermen to construct new tracks down Royal Street between Esplanade Street and Canal Street. This section of road served many established businesses in the center of town. The tracks were planned to serve customers in the area and convey people through the congested center of town with greater speed. The landowners on this part of the street were outraged at

³⁶ *Southern Star*, November 2, 1865, April 5, 8, 1866; *New Orleans Bee*, April 10, 1866, June 18, 19, July 2, 1866, *Picayune*, April 6; *Daily Crescent*, May 16, 1866 Howard P. Chudacoff and Judith E. Smith, *The Evolution of American Urban Society*, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1988), 83-84.

the prospect of their narrow street being swallowed up by large public transportation. As if this was not bad enough, during the time of construction all the shops in the area would be forced to close. The needs of the entire community were being weighed against the convenience of a few moneyed interests. Aldermen and landowners had a complex balance to strike. The improved surface and grading of a developed street benefited the entire city for drainage and long-term commercial growth. On the other hand there were many areas that desired greater trolley service but could not justify the expense with their small potential ridership. Protestors and contractors became skillful at re-routing circuitous routes through town to serve demand without damaging neighborhoods. Endless city council meetings were devoted to negotiating rights of way and localized design specifications.

Despite thorough planning, some new routes were a mixed blessing. The Tchoupitoulas St. line along the edge of the wharves opened to the public with great fanfare. The line made it much quicker for dockworkers and managers to get around the harbor. In an age where machines could not yet duplicate or directly assist the labors of dockworkers, the trolleys acted as a sort of “force-multiplier” through speed. The growing complexity of network integration could also prove problematic. Shipping companies gradually discovered that if streetcars were making departures in their area, the street would have to remain open. Cotton bales could no longer be loaded and unloaded from large wagons in the street, as this practice now blocked railroad tracks. Employees could now arrive for work on time, but their duties were more difficult.³⁷

Streetcar operators owed a contractual duty to the city to maintain the streets along their routes, but the city attorney was usually slow to pursue legal recourses. When new routes were

³⁷ *New Orleans Bee*, July 20, September 19, 20, October 23, 1866; *Southern Star*, March 28, 1866; *Daily Crescent*, April 17, 19, 1866.

improperly graded, landowners might find that water ran out of the street and into buildings, instead of the other way around. The scheme of road maintenance was potentially a brilliant way of making the railroad business give back to the community in a virtuous cycle. City taxes were invested in the trolley company. The trolley company built tracks and first-rate road improvements. Profits would then fund either new improvements or public services. The theory worked better than the practice, because City Hall lacked the conviction to pursue industry when it failed its social obligations. Land values sometimes increased with the addition of transportation service, but residents were also reminded of potential perils in the news.

Riders sometimes found themselves sitting “too close for comfort,” so that streetcars frequently became the focus of community frustrations. Periodic unpleasant streetcar encounters served as harbingers of racial and class violence that would soon scar the city. It was common for pickpockets and muggers to prey on riders while they waited at the curbside. Bolder criminals even reached through windows as the car passed to snatch items off of people at the window seats. New Orleans had a high incidence of crime long before the social upheaval of the Civil War. Events of Reconstruction allowed Southern white conservatives to use freedmen as scapegoats for the crime that had always plagued the predominantly white city. In the early years of Union occupation it was common for freedmen to demand equal access to public transportation. The Union army allowed freedmen soldiers to ride on streetcars with white people. The city maintained separate fleets of streetcars for whites and blacks as it did shortly before the war. Cars for free people of color traditionally bore a star emblem to distinguish them from the more numerous cars intended for whites. There never seemed to be nearly enough “star cars” for black riders during the war, so sometimes both races crowded

together for the sake of expediency. When blacks rode the streetcars without stricter restrictions they were blamed for most transportation-related crimes. Freedmen frequently did rob white passengers on the cars, but this was more a democratization of crime than a new black phenomenon. Creole victims of crime were recently just as likely to blame the immigrant Irish for a fresh wave of petty larceny.³⁸

On July 30, 1866, a large riot took place at the downtown Mechanics Institute. Radical Republicans and a large group of freedmen attempted to reconvene the state constitutional convention of 1864. It was widely doubted that such a meeting would have any legitimate legal standing against the constitution then in force, but whites sensed that their current political dominance was insecure against genuine civil rights reform. The police department and a mob of white reactionaries responded by fiercely assaulting them. In the wake of this massacre angry blacks took to shooting at car riders from the street and buildings, where they could cleverly lie in wait. Slow, predictable streetcars provided easy targets for freedmen who were too cautious to retaliate more openly for the recent injustices of naked violence or segregation. Although freedmen were sometimes allowed to ride the white cars, the “star” badges on old black cars were not removed. Shortly after the riot a white man was shot dead while riding an old star car, possibly as a sign that the offense would not soon be forgotten. The city never put any transportation-specific crime reduction measures into place, and violence frequently settled rider disputes.³⁹

³⁸ *New Orleans Bee*, March 23, 27, 31, April 3.

³⁹ *New Orleans Bee*, March 31, June 11, August 6, 1866; Doyle, 292; James G. Hollandsworth, *An Absolute Massacre, The New Orleans Race Riot of July 30, 1866*, (Baton Rouge; Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 54-56; Foner, 62-64; Capers, 60-77; *The New York Times*, August 3, 1866; Joe Gray Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed, 1863-1877*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974) 109-111.

A broad method of cutting back on inter-racial crimes in public conveyances was to enforce a new state anti-vagrancy law. It was still possible in theory to ban blacks from public accommodations, but in practice they were often allowed entry. Insecure whites could reduce this occurrence by arresting seemingly idle or obstreperous freedmen.

The oldest police officers say there has never been a greater number of thieves and pickpockets in the city than at present. The streetcars are favorite resorts for the pickpockets. The crowded condition of those conveyances--men standing in the center of the cars, frequently, as thickly as they can pack themselves...The vagrant law, if vigorously enforced by the police and the recorders, will speedily rid the town of these dangerous visitors.⁴⁰

City government was unable to police the streetcars or any other part of town effectively due to a severe shortage of manpower. Despite conservative zeal for enforcing “vagrancy” laws, there were simply too few officers to ensure compliance.

Railroads and streetcars were important for the city’s future, but most present revenues relied on a steady flow of river traffic. Mayor Kennedy attempted to lease some of the city’s better wharves for operating money. On August 23, 1865, General Canby surprised Kennedy with the news that much choice levee and wharf space had been reserved for military purposes. The property was unavailable for any public or private use until its release at an unspecified date. The army claimed the docks as captured property despite the fact that it never directly aided the Confederate military or state. This decision had not been announced in advance to the public or authorities. In fact the military was not even using their waterfront space for any significant support activities. Kennedy’s city surveyor disagreed with the former surveyor about the allocation of wharf space. The surveyors employed by the army had been corrupt

⁴⁰ *Daily Crescent*, April 21, 1866.



Fig. 5. Roustabout on a Quay. Dock work was an area where Freedmen could hope to compete with poor whites for employment. Source: *Mugnier Photograph Collection, NOPL*.



UNO Library

Fig. 6. Cotton Floats. Cotton floats transferred bales from the railroad tracks across wooden docks to waiting ships. Heavy cargoes required strong support. Much cargo rested on the open dock or levee as there was not enough warehouse space to store everything. Source: Moore, Frank B. *Cotton Floats*. In UNO Library, Louisiana and Special Collections Dept. [Online] Available, [http://louisdl.louislibraries.org/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/FBM&CISOPTR=315&REC=8; \[fbm000318\]](http://louisdl.louislibraries.org/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/FBM&CISOPTR=315&REC=8; [fbm000318].). [May 4, 2006]

political men, as opposed to engineers with technical expertise. After much cajoling General Canby conceded that the City of New Orleans did need the revenues from seized docks.⁴¹

The strong current of the Mississippi was very hard on wooden docks. Years of sun and humidity had rendered many piers frail, and sometimes they would collapse without warning. In order to defray expenses, the city required fewer fees of lessees and more construction of facilities. At the expiration of the lease the city would possess all the improvements. The rejuvenation of the docks had a therapeutic affect on the whole city's economy. Passenger ships coming to port brought customers for a wide range of services. Day laboring on the docks was a job that both immigrants and freedmen were willing to take. Dock work did not have the cultural stigma that agricultural labor had, so it provided agreeable opportunity for the whole community. Blacks and whites competed for the same work in many cases, which led to frequent conflict over the years. This conflict was at its worst when trade was depressed. When the city was at its most successful there was enough work for everybody.

There were many distinct tasks in the shipping business, and each link in the chain enabled a different profession. "Screwmen" were the skilled laborers who specialized in packing cotton compactly. Different sets of workers unloaded boxes and barrels. Although both blacks and whites practiced most of these specialties, whites dominated the higher paying strata. Mayor Monroe had originally risen to political power through connections made in stevedoring. If the business was good enough for the mayor, then it could not be wholly

⁴¹ Bergeron, Volume 9, 8-9, 33-34, 71, 72, 360, 569, 628, 654-656.

denigrated. Monroe identified with these common people, and was more accepted by the mass of white working men than Kennedy.⁴²

Census records show that the number of black workers increased in most of these specialized roles. From 1860 to 1870 the number of black sailors and steamboatmen in the port grew from 84 to 785, showing both a greater need for their assistance and a willingness on their part to work. Porters increased from 20 to 181, and blacksmiths increased from 10 to 89. The number of coopers increased from 42 to 154, adding to the wide variety of support roles they participated in. Much of this change is attributable to the distinct counting of slaves in the occupation tables of 1860, but the men who stayed on in their work through the transition to free labor had defended their jobs against white competitors. There are even black machinists and boiler makers listed in the 1870 table, which required modern technical skills. As a percentage of the total labor force these numbers were small, but they were significant in forming a core of relative financial success within the black community. Without prosperity for the port in general, these employment figures would not have been possible.⁴³

The city government had signed many long-term contracts for the operation of river ferries before the war. During the fall of the city many ferries were evacuated or destroyed, so some of these contracts had to be renegotiated. Mayor Kennedy and the city's Bureau of Streets and Landings held the new contractors to the same requirements that existed before the war. Ferries were to be steam-powered craft of specific size and design. The lessees were obliged to construct docks and support buildings on city land with functional clocks and gas lighting. Fares were limited to very reasonable amounts considering the city's inflation

⁴² *New Orleans True Delta*, February 18, 1865; *New Orleans Bee*, April 11, June 2, 7, July 21, 1866; *Southern Star*, April 3, 1866; Eric Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863-1923*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 5-9, 32-35.

⁴³ Blassingame, 223-230

problem. All seemed to be well with the city's ferry arrangements until the election of Mayor Monroe in the spring of 1866. Monroe and some of the new aldermen claimed that the contracts had gone to the wrong people. Selected ferry operations and wharf repair contracts were re-submitted to the bidding process. An examination of the new contracts suggests that the city did not gain very much by the cancellation of Kennedy's original plans. It seems as though Monroe's alterations were political in nature, and not concerned with finance. The established fares for ferry passage remained the same for customers, but the total amount of city fees was reduced by \$1200. The new Canal Street ferry operator drastically increased his profit margin. It is likely that this was a form of political payoff, as the only benefit realized by the city in the contractual change is a slightly greater specificity in the nature of public accommodations.⁴⁴

Like the city's arrangements with street-car companies, ferry contracts paid long term dividends to the public. Operators were made liable for the maintenance of public clocks, gas lighting, and restrooms at the landings on opposite banks. It was a clever bargain to get the contractor to improve the landings out of his own budget, rather than trouble the Bureau of Streets and Landings for construction labor. Nevertheless, maximizing city profits was probably put aside for political expediency.

The infrastructure changes to New Orleans presented mixed results. Streetcar services expanded geographically, but racial strife lessened the benefits to the public. The paltry 386 miles of railroad tracks connecting the city to the region had been heavily damaged from war, weather, and neglect. For the most part these were restored to at least partial use by 1866. By

⁴⁴ New Orleans Office of the Mayor, "Franchises Granted for Ferries and Wharves", (City Archives AA671, New Orleans Public library, 1866-1874), 80-81; New Orleans Office of the Mayor, Records of Contracts made by the City of New Orleans, (City Archives AA660, New Orleans Public Library, 1866-1882) 1-29, 55-61.

the end of that year one could travel by train to New York City almost uninterrupted. Water transportation was easier to restore to its prewar capacity, but there was still more demand than availability in 1865. In 1866 there was a strong increase in the river trade with cities upstream, and the total number of ship landings would continue to increase steadily for the next 20 years. There were great triumphs of engineering and legal acumen, but the entire community was unable to join in the relative reverie. Over a quarter of the city's new polity was prevented from experiencing the pleasures of travel without at least the fear of exclusion. Black workers sometimes found employment there, but rolling cotton up the levee all day did not seem like much of a departure from their previous servitude. On the positive side, typical black wages of one to two dollars per day were relatively high compared to the rest of the country. As one measure of the city's success in reestablishing trade, New Orleans paid over 76% of all state taxes between October, 1864, and January, 1866. While rural areas suffered from poor crop prices and floods the city could prosper. The freedom granted to new state governments by the Johnson administration allowed local public and private investors to gather their economic affairs together from the confusion and diffusion of wartime management. This freedom of action was abused with respect to the civil rights of the black citizenry.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Taylor, 318-319, 326-327, 337-342

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEMS OF HEALTH AND SAFETY

When General Butler occupied New Orleans with the Union Army he tried to focus his attentions outwards, towards the Confederate Army up-river. In order to do that, he had to feel secure in his base of operations. One of the general's primary requests for Mayor Monroe was to keep the streets clean. All Union soldiers had a terror of contracting yellow fever or cholera, and it was thought that cleaner streets and quarantines might somehow prevent disease.⁴⁶

Throughout the 1860s western medicine had struggled against the spread of yellow fever, but its exact method of transmission remained a mystery. Some believed that it was always imported from Caribbean trading partners. These thinkers emphasized the importance of maintaining a strict river quarantine.⁴⁷ Others believed that yellow fever arose spontaneously from "miasmatic vapors" through the decomposition of plant and animal matter. Although the swamps surrounding the city could never be totally drained, a great deal of domestic organic waste compounded the perceived danger by filling the streets of the city itself. Whole neighborhoods still lacked indoor plumbing connections to the city water works, forcing residents to rely on wells of questionable purity. Cisterns were common alternatives to wells, but they bred copious mosquitoes. In a time of malnutrition among the local poor and refugees, immune systems were weakened against waterborne diseases such as cholera. For a

⁴⁶ Carrigan, 82-94

⁴⁷ Carrigan, 86, The word "quarantine" originates from the Italian "quarantina", meaning "forty days" of isolation.

sub-tropical city embedded in the swamp such illnesses constituted an ever-present threat even in the best of times.⁴⁸

Mayor Monroe and other Confederate sympathizers were unenthusiastic about the task of sanitation, hoping that their occupiers would be killed in such an epidemic. This perverse desire was secretive for the most part, but sometimes creoles were blunt enough to confront soldiers with the threat. New Orleanians were aware that a new tropical epidemic could claim locals as well as soldiers, but they were sufficiently bitter to bear the sacrifice. In May 1862 Butler removed the entire civil government and replaced it with officers from his staff after their repeated refusals to cooperate.⁴⁹

To prevent the yellow fever he feared, General Butler hired 2,000 of the city's poor to clean the city streets. In order to provide the workers' wages and meals, Butler imposed a heavy tax on businessmen and holders of city bonds. In the first of three rounds of taxation, over \$300,000 was extracted from the commercial class. Some damaged levees and wharves were partially rebuilt to assist the Union occupation forces. Butler also levied heavy taxes to continue the Confederate policy of feeding and clothing the poor. Butler's civic works were not universally successful, and they had come at tremendous cost to taxpayers and the city treasury, but the town remained remarkably disease free for the next year and a half. These were the

⁴⁸ Carrigan, 84-87, 229-230, Some doctors were so anxious to learn the cause of contagion that they drank the black vomit of yellow fever victims. This only produced a bad taste in the mouth, but such vile experiments were repeated by many competing physicians; *New Orleans Bee*, July 25, Aug. 22, 1866.

⁴⁹ Doyle, 63-65; Kendall, 278-287, Mayor Monroe was held in prison at Ship Island and Fort Pickens from the time of his removal until the summer of 1865, when he was released by President Johnson; Grace King, *New Orleans, the Place and the People*, (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1895; reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968), 300-312; Capers, 64-65; Grimsley, 52-54.

kinds of necessary measures that the city had only taken once before, when the epidemic of 1853 had driven the city into fearful hysterics.⁵⁰

Although none of the doctors at the time could explicitly explain how sanitation assisted public health, when their lives were at risk they perceived its importance. John Duffy's study of the 1853 epidemic shows that the leaders of 1862 were well aware of public and private hygiene's importance in disease prevention. Mayor Monroe had been a leader of the riverfront labor movement as a stevedore, and many of his constituents had probably been among the sick and the dead in 1853. The poor who toiled outdoors and had been born somewhere else were the most vulnerable. Monroe had fallen into this category himself when he arrived in town from the North in the 1840s. It was not ignorance that kept Monroe and his deputy Pierre Soulé from properly complying with the health measures; it was a flagrant disregard for the common good.⁵¹

General Butler's public works projects did much to clean the city in 1862, but relatively little was accomplished after that. The money required to fund such an intensive operation was more than the city would pay. Rebuilding railroads and docks offered the promise of future revenue, but the benefits of clean streets were far less obvious. Many natives of New Orleans thought of tropical diseases as a macabre rite of passage. Once they survived their first epidemic, they obtained partial immunity for the rest of their life. It was widely believed that people of color were genetically resistant to yellow fever and other maladies, so fewer precautions were taken for them. Many freedmen had come to the city for government support or to escape the hand of oppressive employers, and these people lived in poor conditions. A

⁵⁰ John Duffy, *Sword of Pestilence: The New Orleans Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1853*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), 60-65

⁵¹ Duffy, 8-9, 12, 19; Leon Cyprian Soulé, *The Know Nothing Party in New Orleans: A Reappraisal*, (New Orleans: The Louisiana Historical Association, 1961), , 41, 85, 111.

number of freedmen had built shanty-towns on the edge of the swamp. The waste of the city flowed into the cypress marshes in their direction. Other freedmen and poor white immigrants lived in densely packed tenements near the dockyards. Many cities had poor waste management during this era, but few of them had such level terrain that the water tended to remain relatively stagnant. Few large cities also shared the oppressive heat of a New Orleans summer, when warmth and sun caused bacterial blooms. Milwaukee's water was almost as dirty, but at least it was frozen for part of the year. Unpaved streets in poor neighborhoods were much harder to clean than the cobblestones of the garden district or Vieux Carré. Privies were filthy and clean water was rare. Conditions were ripe for a return to New Orleans' notorious epidemics.⁵²

In the late 1850s the people of New Orleans had taken some steps to improve cleanliness of their public streets. Large pumping machines had been installed near the river to pump water through the gutters and canals of the city. This water would flush waste and impurities down towards the swamp and the lake. This device was ingenious and economical, as it cost far less than continuing General Butler's public works project employing 2,000 men. Unfortunately this system relied on the complete cooperation of the city's inhabitants in order to function properly. If trash was thrown into the street instead of taken to the rubbish pier, then the flow of water was interrupted. Stagnant, warm water combined with animal and human waste bred vast quantities of pond scum:

Arriving at New Orleans, the traveler, stepping ashore from a Mississippi steamboat, is saluted in a most unwelcome manner. The stagnant water in the street-gutters sends up a stench that is almost stifling.... The streets are clean, but the gutters, the water in which seems to run up hill, as the little current perceptible is directed away from the river, are filled with garbage and filth in some places, ... Gen. Butler, it is said, is the

⁵² Reinders 89-92; Kendall 225, 286; Capers 10-15; Judith Walzer Leavitt, *Milwaukee and the Politics of Health Reform*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996). 4-6

only Mayor this city ever had who succeeded in depriving the citizens of the unwholesome effluvia of gutterism, which they seem to like...”⁵³

Merely pumping water through the gutters was not always enough to clear the scum. Bacteria would thrive in hot, shallow moisture and rich growth medium in the heat of New Orleans’ summer. The situation steadily worsened throughout 1865 and 1866. Citizen complaints mounted that some streets had been dirty for weeks at a time. Private contractors were incapable of living up to their obligations, and the city aldermen balked at the expense of paying different contractors to do the same work. For a time nothing was done. In a creative solution the city fire department volunteered to help. Every fire engine team chose a neighborhood, and they blasted the gutter filth out of the way with fire hoses. Firemen had always been local heroes, but now they became pillars of the community. The fire hose program was successful for a time, but it left the city vulnerable to fires by dispersing too many resources. The firemen stopped cleaning the streets, and the filth returned. What would it profit a man to save his house and lose his health? This was a task that City Hall was obligated to solve.⁵⁴

Some enterprising aldermen announced that a newly designed steam-powered street cleaner would be brought to the city. The aldermen and Mayor Monroe were anxious to see a demonstration outside City Hall. On the day of the demonstration the Board of Aldermen adjourned early to see the apparatus at work. Later the Aldermen would discuss the matter and decide that the expenditure of \$325,000 for mechanical street cleaners was not worth the cost. These were not the highly valued dollars of the war’s beginning, but devalued inflationary

⁵³ *The New York Times*, July 14, 1866.

⁵⁴ *Daily Crescent*, April 7, 1866; Capers 81-89, 153; Carrigan, 69.

dollars. During the epidemic of 1853 over \$200,000 had been insufficient to cover the costs of nursing the infected, so the cost of prevention was well within reasonable budgetary considerations. For over a year they had complained about the high cost of labor and unreliability of contractors. The only chance they had to mechanize the system and cut out the middle-men was rejected. If the city re-hired blacks to clean the streets then they would have had greater resources to organize politically. It was also not in City Hall's interest to replace former patronage positions with black salaried employees, which would alienate the whites who chose the mayor in the first place. City government frequently hid behind economics to disguise their distaste for the black working class.⁵⁵

Yellow fever remained absent from New Orleans, but cholera and small pox returned. Throughout 1865 and 1866 the diseases spread. Local newspapers were boosters for their community, so they focused on science and medicine rather than human suffering. Most of the theories they put forward were pseudo-science, though the importance of sanitation was widely recognized by almost everyone. In spite of the public's lack of cooperation with city garbage disposal, the city government gamely tried to keep streets clean. Appropriations for the cleaning of public sinks and privies were made. Heavier nuisance fines were demanded of commercial livery owners. It was realized that passenger steamships had parked right in front of the city's water-works intake, and raw sewage was being sucked into the public water supply. These ship owners were fined and made to move downstream. Everything inexpensive that could be done for sanitation was done, although actually scouring the city as Butler had done was never seriously contemplated.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ *Daily Crescent*, March 28, 1866; *New Orleans Bee*, May 30, June 6, 21, 1866; *Southern Star*, March 22, April 4, 1866, *New York Times*, July 14, 1866.

The New Orleans Bee regularly reported on the cholera outbreak at the time of the riot in 1866. Daily updates kept a running total of the dead and infected, as well as their race and what neighborhoods they came from. This bi-lingual paper catered to both Americans and Creoles, and seems to have maintained the most unbiased reportage. It was the only major paper to have sent a reporter to the abortive constitutional convention of 1866.

The health crisis was bad, but everyone believed that they could depend on Charity Hospital to give them the best of care. This belief was accurate for the most part, as the Catholic nuns there employed excellent doctors. These nuns lived up to their Christian beliefs by admitting everyone, regardless of race or creed. New Orleans society supplied this institution with generous donations. A problem arises, however, when one considers Charity Hospital in the context of city-wide health management. There were over a dozen different hospitals and clinics, and few of them conferred with each other about statistics. When the cholera epidemic of late 1866 struck, the city health commissioners were unable to say exactly how many were sick and how many had died. Authorities were unable locate the specific origins of the sickness or determine the categories of people who were hardest hit. Some observers partially calculated statistics based on the number of burials within a week. Such nonchalant responses to mortal danger typify whites' refusal to accept blacks' status as full human beings, let alone citizens.⁵⁷

Freedmen could go to Charity Hospital, but most of them went to the Marine hospital on the East side of town, where the physicians had limited contact with the rest of the medical

⁵⁶ *New Orleans Bee*, October 5,14, 1865, August 8,10 13, 20, 22, 24, September 1, 8, 24, 1866; *Southern Star*, March 9, 1866; Doyle, 64-72.

⁵⁷ Carrigan, 336



Fig. 7. Charity Hospital. New Orleans Charity Hospital was located on Tulane Avenue. It was operated by Catholic nuns, but heavily subsidized by city government and secular charities. Source: *C. Milo Williams Photographic Collection, NOPL.*



Fig. 8. Black Home. Conditions for many freedmen were unhealthy, remaining out of sight and out of mind on the edge of the swamp. Others lived in similarly deplorable conditions in overcrowded tenements. Source: *Mugnier Photograph Collection, NOPL.*

community. When officer Stephen Hoyt acted as mayor in 1864 and early 1865, a good deal of his correspondence consisted of permission slips for white indigents and freedmen to gain admission to Charity Hospital. Charity had admitted free people of color before the war as a matter of policy, but Hoyt wanted to make sure that the really needy were taken in. After restoration to civilian rule, there is little evidence of official concern for either individuals or hospital administration. It may be that in the absence of sympathetic administrators in City Hall, freedmen felt more welcome at the military hospital, which had treated them in the service. This disconnect between the organs of public safety and the people was hazardous. Organization in prevention and treatment was simply impossible. These conditions could have made the difference between a small epidemic and a widespread outbreak.⁵⁸

Blacks frequently received inferior medical attention in part because it was believed they had partial immunity to tropical diseases. It was sometimes suggested that during times of epidemic only blacks should be made to perform labor outdoors, owing to their natural resistance. Doctors with extensive experience in assisting blacks through severe yellow fever epidemics knew that fate could prove otherwise. Dr. Holcombe of northern Louisiana wrote of his personal experience treating plantation workers. The theory of “negro immunity” was “as baseless as the fabric of a vision.” Much of medicine to doctors of that generation consisted of observation and diagnosis. The best doctors noticed that blacks were dying in epidemic years too. The prescription of natural remedies shared emphasis with the provision of attentive nursing care. Allopathic cures favored by Holcombe and many doctors of the time were thought to be equally effective with people of different races. Holcombe represents doctors of

⁵⁸ Mayor’s Office, Permits Issued By the Acting Military Mayor, 39, 50, 94, 162, 164, 195, 198, 217, 240, 252, 269, These admission slips and instructions for the hospital are not all simply boilerplate. Many of them specify names, families, and particular circumstances, which seem to suggest authentic compassion despite their brevity.

the 1860s who tested treatments on blacks because they wanted to learn of the human body's resistance, and not simply because the patient was expendable. These cures frequently consisted of very small quantities of chemicals diluted with a massive amount of water. Allopathy and homeopathy gained such popularity in Wisconsin that the Mayor of Milwaukee in the 1870s had become famous for his medical acumen. Success in curing people had made him a hero among the immigrants for whom the new treatments were credible. Wild, heroic remedies were losing favor as people realized they failed to work.⁵⁹

Almost as many whites died from cholera and other diseases in these years as freedmen, but city government periodically insisted throughout this period that the city had never been cleaner or healthier. This reportage kept up a long tradition of disinformation that the city fathers maintained in an ill-conceived public relations campaign. Jo Ann Carrigan's analysis of city newspapers argues that they were not reliable reporters of disease even as late as the 1890s, when the common telegraph dispatch could easily reveal pestilence to a national audience. Captains of industry and commerce were afraid of tarnishing their city's reputation. Those invested in the city's economic future tried to escape the old tropical climate stereotype of feebleness. If a newspaper shamed public authorities into action with daily epidemic reports, then both readers and advertisers must have really been disgusted with the state of things.⁶⁰

Several of the smaller hospitals in town were devoted to the care of infectious diseases. The neighbors of these institutions had long clamored for their removal. Though city government did not display any great interest in solving the city's contagious diseases, they at

⁵⁹ Savitt, 123-125, This was the case for yellow fever and malaria. In most instances 19th century perceptions of biological differences between the races were imagined, but there is actually some basis in modern medicine for the claim. The same blood traits that make sickle cell anemia possible for people of African descent also provides them real resistance to malaria; Numbers, Leavitt, 26-29 Holcombe, 12.

⁶⁰ *New Orleans Bee*, August 22, 24; Hollandsworth, 130-140; Duffy 16; Carrigan 361, 366, 369-373.

least recognized the necessity of isolation wards. Repeated requests for closure of the small pox hospital were rejected in the interests of the greater good, despite its location in a middle-class section of town. On the other hand, the city insane asylum was so poorly funded and overcrowded that recent axe murderers were released into the public on marginal pretenses. Public outcry over these strangely inconsistent priorities failed to move the mayor or aldermen.⁶¹

For many years the official state and city health departments had proven inadequate to the needs of the sick during times of epidemic disease. Compassionate individuals had come together to form independent hospice organizations such as the Howard Association. They may be termed “hospice” groups because they generally did not claim to offer healing services. Their primary function was to provide nursing for those weak from disease. These groups were composed of men who believed that they had become either partially or wholly immune to Yellow Fever and other epidemic diseases. Regardless of this margin of safety, people saw it as an act of chivalry to put themselves in danger to save the lives of other men. Volunteers also rendered service as professional administrators for temporary hospital facilities. They possessed roughly the same knowledge of medical science as actual doctors, but performed a different function. While doctors purported to prescribe heroic or allopathic cures, the Howard association served primarily to nurse the afflicted, and serve their more basic bodily needs. A powerful sense of noblesse oblige urged the compassionate to ease their fellow men’s suffering. Local government was among the least likely to render assistance to the poor or minorities at these times.⁶²

⁶¹ *Daily Crescent*, July 14, 1866; *New Orleans Bee*, July 14, April 25, 1866.

⁶² Carrigan 346-349; Duffy 54-55, 128.

By way of contrast, Milwaukee relied less on volunteer organizations. Leavitt shows that their emphasis was on control of municipal services. There was a faction that favored something akin to socialized city services, and a city faction in favor of free market capitalist solutions. Both sides could come together in favor of a centralized city health department, which was founded in 1867. There were hospitals for the poor and procedures to care for masses in an epidemic, but these were frequently occasions for the use of public authority, not private charity. Public boards were appointed to direct relief efforts and accept some degree of responsibility for results. For a long time these boards only had authority after a crisis had begun, and had no effect on preventive sanitary measures, but people soon realized that this was an unfortunate oversight.⁶³

All the efforts of the Howard Association were very useful when their expertise was needed, but these measures were only useful *after* the sickness had already taken root. Gentleman nurses tended to have regular employment outside the field of medicine, and could not be relied upon to serve the people's needs all year every year. Their budget also relied heavily on donations, many of which came from out of town. These donor networks were based on the cities that exchanged the most shipping with the port of New Orleans. Much of their effort was altruistic, but sickness in New Orleans also represented a threat and an expense for their own business. Sympathetic Philadelphians had donated generously to the cause of relief in 1853, but after the bitterness of war it was uncertain if they would be so quick to give in the future. The Howard Association was a strong, grass roots organization, but it was potentially overwhelmed by the sheer numbers in need. This had happened long before the influx of black residents, with their reliance on indigent aid. For these reasons it was necessary

⁶³ Leavitt, 20-24, 42-45

for the city to emphasize prevention, where the responsibility fell more squarely upon public sanitation and the Bureau of Streets and Landings.

Finding bodies of the sick and dying in the streets became common enough that the city instituted day and night curbside pickup service from police stations. This had historically been done with stray domestic pets and livestock when rabies was a problem. When the wild animal population became too great, or citizens had lodged complaints, the city sanitation department would scatter poisoned sausages around the streets to kill them. The bodies would sometimes lie rotting for some time before crews found the time to collect them. It was deemed that the foul odor's brief duration was preferable to the presence of unwanted scavengers. Innocent human victims were basically being treated like animals. The government might have wanted to ignore the problem, but citizens could not countenance passing the sick in their daily travels. It was simply cheaper and easier for the city to collect corpses than it was to clean the city and prevent disease in the first place.⁶⁴

Milwaukee also had serious problems with organic street filth at this time. There were a large number of destitute immigrant children who spent their days collecting rotted plants and flesh from the gutter to feed to livestock. These "swill children" were so desperate that when the city banned their dangerous practice, they actually asked to keep swill gathering legal. The city council held firm, and it was the first step in a long struggle to keep public spaces sanitary. Like New Orleans, Milwaukee had a flowing river to carry organic and inorganic waste away from the city. They had to break themselves of this habit to spare their drinking water and

⁶⁴ *New Orleans Bee*, August 10, 13, 1866; Duffy, 18-19.

winter ice harvest from contamination. Wisconsiners did a much better job of burying their human dead, which were never a complaint compared to slaughterhouse waste.⁶⁵

At the same time that cholera was growing in the streets, another disturbance was about to grip the city. Policing New Orleans had always been a strange and difficult task. The extremes of carnival and civil unrest had been handled relatively well by Union forces, which imported some policemen from New York who could handle the task. One finds many creative and unique directives for the enforcement of order by General Banks. In Mardi Gras of 1864 the city seemed as though it might settle down for innocent fun, but the specter of subterfuge loomed regardless. “There are drunken soldiers going about town in masks. See to it that no soldiers wear masks, and that no maskers dress as soldiers.”⁶⁶ With Mayor Kennedy’s appointment in 1865 authority was granted by the governor to purge the police department of undesirable officers. Many officers who were originally recruited by the army for their loyalty to the Union were fired. The size of the force was also reduced from 450 to 400. Considering that many of these were “beat” policemen on walking circuits, there were barely enough to watch the city in quiet times, let alone real disturbances.⁶⁷

Urban serenity became even less likely with the re-election of Mayor Monroe in 1866. One of his first actions was to fire even more police officers, and re-appoint Thomas E. Adams as Chief. Adams had last been chief during the turbulent 1850s, when politically and ethnically motivated mob violence had regularly ruled election-day. Monroe’s political career took its

⁶⁵ Leavitt, 122-125

⁶⁶ Banks Letter Book, 359, Jan 20 1864, “General, I am informed that Miller, of the 2nd District Police, who was a candidate for Chief of Police, is interfering with the election, to the detriment of the Government which it serves. I desire you to send for him, and to communicate to him the fact that it is unnecessary for him to interest himself in the matter, so long as he holds official position, and that if he continues this course, it will certainly bring him to trouble.”

⁶⁷ Rousey, 114.

initial form from the aggressively militant machine politics of the Know-Nothing Party. This formative experience was to shape his attitude towards proponents of black suffrage and other civil rights radicals.⁶⁸

Monroe filled the ranks of the police department with a lot of former Confederate soldiers, some of whom received special pardons for acts committed during the war. They spent much of their time trying to impose their own style of order on the newly formed freedman neighborhoods in town. Because there were so few officers in relation to the neighborhood, even the smallest altercation had the potential to escalate violently. On September 13, 1866, a single officer marched into a mass of freedmen and attempted to arrest two alleged prostitutes. It was in the middle of an area frequented by black soldiers, so they acted quickly and forcefully to free their friends. The Police could only muster an additional five men for backup against a crowd of several hundred men throwing stones. These exchanges typified the Police Department's relationship with the poor and black community. City authorities could not be troubled to help them out of extreme squalor, but officials went out of their way to interfere in their public social life.⁶⁹

Protests were made in Republican circles regarding the wisdom and propriety of these police actions, but federal authorities would not intervene until much blood had been spilt.

The Mayor is in full exercise of all his functions, with no actual interference by the military authorities. The report is that in place of Gen. Sheridan being ordered to report to the Lieutenant-Governor he was given, by the President, plenary authority to suspend or dismiss any officer, civil or military, he saw fit. He removed no one.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Soulé, 3, 41, 112, 114; Dennis Charles Rousey, *Policing the Southern City: New Orleans 1805-1889*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 114-119.

⁶⁹ New Orleans Bee, Sept. 13, 1866.

⁷⁰ *New York Times*, August 21, 1866.

Mayor Monroe had been given two chances to demonstrate restraint in the use of his executive powers. The first time General Butler exiled him from the city in 1862. The second time Congress, the nation, and the world would hear of his people's brutality in brutalizing a free assembly. By unconsciously enacting the "unreconstructed" stereotype Monroe removed all doubt of his incompetence. He convinced Congress and the national media that their fears for black liberty were well founded. No amount of false testimony in local court could absolve the police or the Mayor of guilt in the matter as far as national public opinion was concerned. Many of the men called to testify about the actions of that day were somehow involved in bringing it about. Others were biased against the propriety of the convention in the first place. Few outside observers were fooled by the legal farce. The city bore the weight of innocent blood on its conscience, and the responsible elites would be shamed for it.⁷¹

Through ill judgments and racial intolerances the leadership of New Orleans demonstrated their inability to run the city temperately. Mayors Kennedy, Monroe, and Chief Adams were too hot in their tempers and too cool in their concern for the newly expanded polity.

⁷¹ *Grand Jury Report and the Evidence Taken by Them in Reference to the Great Riot*, 1-10.

CONCLUSIONS

New Orleans' civil authorities accomplished much to regenerate their city in 1865 and 1866. The South was a shattered, demoralized, and impoverished place after the war, and much of the region was preoccupied with the problem of re-establishing plantation style agriculture in the absence of traditional slave labor. New Orleans had to reach out and reconnect itself to national and international commerce. The Opelousas Railroad helped reunify the city with the state after three years of unfortunate division. The economic ambitions of the original investors might someday be realized. The New Orleans and Jackson Railroad's resurrection re-connected New Orleans to the cotton lands and the rest of the nation. The boost in trade revenue filled state tax coffers for years to come. These links were absolutely necessary to compete with northern railroads funneling goods to the Atlantic coast. Improvements in local rail service re-affirmed community pride and provided hope for progress. For the first time since 1861 community actions were taking place about the nature and direction of the city's growth. The city asserted its right to regulate the public use of commercial spaces. Revitalizing the city's capacity for trade would help improve the job market for both skilled and unskilled labor. This could somewhat relieve the new tensions of racial competition created by a free labor market.

Administrators failed to keep their city clean and free of disease, a sad indictment of their care for the people. Though the state of medical expertise did not allow for scientific disease prevention, people in authority failed to take the steps that were generally accepted to

be helpful. This disregard for the public good transcended boundaries of race and class, since tropical diseases had a way of transcending mere social boundaries in the recent past. Aside from law enforcement, public sanitation was City Hall's only area of responsibility that could not turn a profit, and it was treated as such. The city government was only accustomed to playing a support role in health instead of a primary role, and lacked the framework for decisive action. This was at the same time when other cities, such as Milwaukee, were learning important public health lessons from the medical aspects of the Civil War. Cost cutting ceased to be beneficial to the city when the threat of epidemic casualties became an issue. Those who accounted for the city's expenses lacked the insight that life itself was the greatest benefit of the cessation of hostilities, and not the keys to City Hall. A freedman's death from preventable disease is just as unfortunate as death in a race riot. In either case responsible people were culpable for doing nothing. Public health always has a cost, and for the people of Reconstruction New Orleans, it would have been worth paying. City leaders were more interested in securing the uncontested rule of a sickly, run down white city than in sharing power and public space with healthy freedmen.⁷²

These failings show how the abstract issue of denying blacks their civil rights produced negative effects beyond the realm of politics. President Johnson can be reasonably held to account for his abdication of civil rights issues, but it may be asking too much of him to know about the problems of sanitation over 1600 miles away. Problems such as this were thought of as local in character. Local officials failed in their delegated tasks because of systematic refusals to grant blacks a new niche in society. It is the mission of city government to hold all the pieces of the civic experience together, and one must not overlook the common problems of

⁷² Carrigan 374-376, Savitt 11,70.

urban living. All of the infrastructure in the world cannot overcome the troubles of popular unrest. As drama played out across the headlines of newspapers across the nation, the city became known as a potentially dangerous and unpleasant place to do business. Maybe one's cargo would go through, or maybe it would fall victim to some mischief. The world was left with the true impression that the city was too foolish and bitter to realize that the world had changed, and properly left old ways behind.

For much of Reconstruction the Southern states would try to cast off the negative stereotypes of the Old South and try to develop a new image. Many Freedmen would try to disprove the stereotype of the lazy field hand by moving to the city in search of better employment. The opportunity and competition for city jobs provided a valuable lesson in free labor, and they would prove their worth through impressive service. Business leaders sought evidence that the South was capable of competing in the world economy without the use of slave labor. New Orleans was positioned to exhibit both of these virtuous undertakings, but fell victim to its own traditional vices. Apathy, arrogance, and an unwillingness to recognize human frailty squandered the city's chances for real greatness and honor in the wake of war's tragedy.

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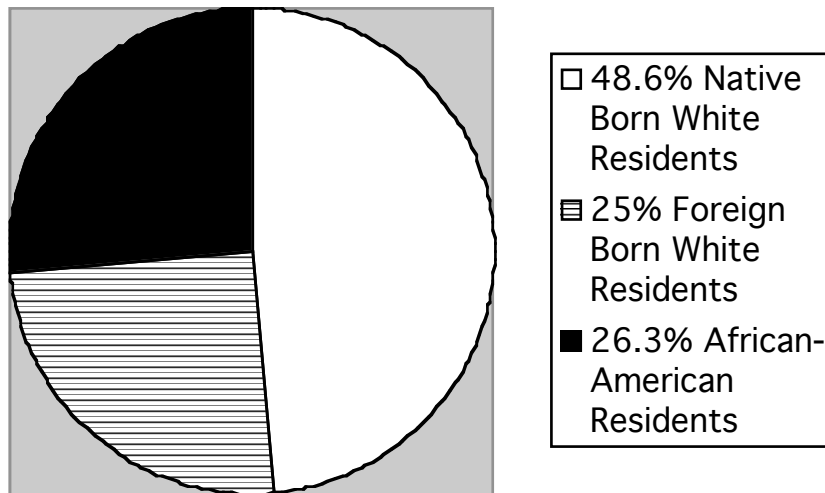
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APPENDIX: DEMOGRAPHIC PIE CHARTS



Part A. In 1860 only a small portion of the city was Black, and most of them were either the Francophone middle class or highly skilled slave artisans.



Part B. By 1870 a large number of former plantation laborers had moved to New Orleans. Given the mass migration that took place immediately after the war, it is difficult to know how many Black refugees lived in or near New Orleans in 1865.

Fig. 10. Demographic Pie Charts. A comparison between 1860 and 1870 drawing upon the United States Census.

VITA

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