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Rehearsal for Redemption: The Politics of Post-Emancipation Violence

in Kentucky’s Bluegrass Region

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Abstract

Rehearsal for Redemption: The Politics of Post-Emancipation Violence in Kentucky’s Bluegrass Region

By James Michael Rhyne

In the late antebellum period, changing economic and social realities fostered conflicts among Kentuckians as tension built over a number of issues, especially the future of slavery. Local clashes matured into widespread, violent confrontations during the Civil War, as an ugly guerrilla war raged through much of the state. Additionally, African Americans engaged in a wartime contest over the meaning of freedom. Nowhere were these interconnected conflicts more clearly evidenced than in the Bluegrass Region. Though Kentucky had never seceded, the Freedmen’s Bureau established a branch in the Commonwealth after the war. The efforts of freed people and Bureau agents to achieve a social revolution were opposed by roving bands of white supremacists, self-defined as “Negro Regulators” or “Judge Lynch’s Men.” Using violence as a political tactic, white supremacists under the banner of the reunited state Democratic Party consolidated their control of local and state politics in the violence-marred election of 1867, in effect “redeeming” Kentucky from perceived federal interference. These self-styled southern conservatives were aided by voters who valued reconciliation and restoration of order far more than equal rights and social justice. In fear and frustration over post-emancipation violence, large numbers of freed people fled the state. Those who were left behind had little ability to enjoy their freedom due to the politics of white supremacy. By the early 1870s, though in theory they had been granted equal rights and equal protection under the law, black Kentuckians had failed to achieve the level of freedom they desired.
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Finally, my eternal gratitude goes to close friends and dear family who have sustained me through this process, even in the face of their own pain, sorrow, and loss. This was a story that selected me, more so than I, it, and few people know the full toll the telling of it has exacted. Without the loving kindness of my wife, who with me has paid that toll, I could never have begun writing this dissertation, much less completed it.
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Prologue

“At War with the Best Interest of this Community”:
Community Violence in Antebellum Kentucky

Throughout December 1859 the Lexington *Kentucky Statesman* carried reports concerning a series of meetings held by leading citizens of neighboring Madison County. In a series of resolutions those citizens had leveled scathing criticism at John G. Fee, who was not in Kentucky at the time, and his fellow abolitionists at Berea, resolving among other things that, in their not so humble opinions, “the association of John G. Fee and others is a combination of an incendiary character, not only at war with the best interest of this community, but destructive of all organized society.” Events in Madison reflected an escalating campaign against abolitionists in the Bluegrass Region following John Brown’s raid on Harpers Ferry, Virginia. For example, in Newport, up in Campbell County, a group of citizens had destroyed the office of an abolitionist newspaper. Leaders in Bracken County, also along the Ohio, had organized a local militia company to guard against perceived abolitionist threats, though their real purpose seems to have been to drive out abolitionists like the Reverend G. H. Damon. In Madison, proslavery Kentuckians would take matters into their own hands, eventually organizing a citizen’s committee for the express purpose of driving the Berea leaders from their midst.¹

On December 17 concerned citizens reportedly filled the county courthouse at Richmond, a turnout that, in the mind of the editor of the *Statesman*, “proved that the whole people are in

favor of first principles—self-preservation.” According to the resolutions adopted by this body, Madison had been forced to look after its own affairs, as the laws of the Commonwealth proved insufficient to protect them from abolitionist incendiaries. In point of fact, Kentucky would swiftly adopt laws in early 1860 that severely limited the possibilities and opportunities for white abolitionists or free blacks to undermine slavery in the state, but in the meantime the citizens present took it upon themselves to appoint a committee and instruct them “to take such steps as they deem right and proper in removing the said Fee, Rogers & co. from the county.” Two days before Christmas, the “committee,” some sixty men strong and by some reports well-fortified with bourbon as well as firearms, rode into Berea to give fair, written warning to John Rogers, his house guest James S. Davis, Matilda Fee, the Reverend John F. Broughton, and others. They delivered a simple message: make tracks to the north within ten days or face the consequences.\(^2\)

Just across the Kentucky River from southeastern Fayette County, Madison County trailed only Jefferson, Kenton, Fayette, Campbell, and Mason among Bluegrass counties in total population in 1860. Of Madison’s 17,207 residents, 6,034 were enslaved, making it the fifth largest slaveholding county in the Bluegrass, behind only Jefferson, Fayette, Bourbon, and Shelby. If Madison’s large slave population seems surprising to the casual reader, then the fact that in 1860 this county, now considered part of Appalachia, had more slaves than the Inner Bluegrass county of Scott seems amazing. While Scott had seen a very slight decrease in slave population during the preceding decade, likely a result of the declining hemp industry in central Kentucky, Madison had seen a substantive increase. Additionally, an even fifty percent of Madison’s slaves were under age 15, compared to forty-seven percent for Kentucky as a whole.

These statistics suggest that, far from in decline, slavery in Madison thrived in 1860, and that slaveholders had a staggering financial stake in maintaining the peculiar institution in their county. With well over a hundred thousand enslaved children in their possession, Kentucky’s 38,645 slaveholders on the whole perhaps were not anxious to lose their investment in human capital before they had an opportunity to convert at least a portion of it into cash.

The contest over the future of slavery in the Commonwealth was no late addition to the state’s fight card. It was, from the founding of the state onward, a main event, and it became what some might call a grudge match. As such, slavery and abolitionism in Kentucky have attracted the attention of numerous historians. Still, not enough has been written about the process of emancipation itself. This process began in earnest with activity along the nebulous corridors of the Underground Railroad as slaves emancipated themselves by fleeing north of the Ohio, frequently with the aid of other slaves who stayed behind. The activities of abolitionists such as John G. Fee only served to intensify this contest, as Bluegrass slaveholders rose to the challenge presented by such incendiaries in their midst. Opportunities for emancipation rapidly evolved and expanded with the coming of the American Civil War, and slaves once again led the way in exploiting these opportunities, frequently forcing open new avenues to freedom and pressuring an often reluctant federal government into action on their behalf.

One major goal of this dissertation is to chronicle the ensuing contest over the meaning of freedom that began with widespread wartime emancipation and intensified as numerous white Kentuckians resisted tooth and nail the ratification and implementation of the Thirteenth Amendment. One simply cannot understand the nature of this struggle, the diverse motivations behind the terror campaign to limit the freedom enjoyed by former slaves, and the high price
paid both by Kentucky’s black population and by a group of dedicated white Kentuckians who sought to aid them, without understanding the Commonwealth’s firm commitment to slavery and deep resentment of federal wartime policy regarding the peculiar institution. Therefore this study begins with the roots of Civil War Era conflict, rather than with the Emancipation Proclamation or the Thirteenth Amendment, though both of these documents resulted in significant uproar and turmoil among Kentucky’s slaveholders and their political allies.

Alongside of this narrative of emancipation, this study covers the internal civil war that raged throughout the 1860s in the Commonwealth, a guerrilla war that was in large measure also a contest over the fate of slavery and the meaning of freedom. Indeed, upon delving beneath the dominant narrative of Confederate raiders, rebel guerrillas, bushwhackers (a negative label applied by Confederates to Unionist guerrillas in Kentucky), and outlaws, one finds in Kentucky, as in Missouri, tremendous resentment toward civilians of the opposite political persuasion, overt racial hatred, and outright murder of numerous African Americans by guerrilla bands. In Kentucky, guerrilla warfare emerged both as an overt impetus on the part of the Confederacy to disrupt Union Army operations and as a covert means on the part of disgruntled locals, either Union or Confederate, to strike back at those each group deemed to have betrayed the Commonwealth. If Unionists in the Bluegrass Region had much to fear from guerrillas, so too did southern sympathizers fear a night raid by the local Home Guard unit or an attack by Unionist bushwhackers in reprisal for their disloyalty, whether actual or perceived.

The phrase, “anti-Union guerrilla,” seems a useful way to address the reality that many guerrillas in the Bluegrass had little real connection to the Confederacy, other than a common hatred and bitterness toward the federal government regarding policies of confiscation, emancipation, and recruitment of slaves. These guerrillas also possessed an abiding hatred of
Unionists they blamed for remaining loyal to the Union even as it stripped them of what a clear majority of white residents of the Commonwealth most wanted to protect: the institution of slavery and its invaluable place in the state’s economy and society. It is no coincidence that this guerrilla war reached its zenith at precisely the time when recruitment of Kentucky slaves for the ranks of the United States Colored Troops hit full stride, and at precisely the time when federal officials began discussing in earnest the destruction of slavery throughout the United States as an ultimate, necessary outcome of the war.

Both Kentuckians and federal officials were at best imprecise in their use of “guerrilla” to describe numerous, diverse roving bands of armed men. Some so-called guerrillas were legitimate Confederate cavalry units commanded by the likes of John Hunt Morgan and Basil Duke, while others were mere bandits and cut-throats taking advantage of wartime economic opportunities. A few, like the notorious Sue Mundy, a.k.a. Jerome Clarke, appear to have been all of the above and more, including cold-blooded murderers of numerous unarmed African Americans they encountered during their raids. Though Morgan’s name was ever a terror, this study chooses not to deal in detail with his raids, but rather focuses on smaller bands that ranged the Bluegrass, particularly in the last year of the war. The most persistent and effective guerrilla unit appears to have been a group of partisan rangers led by George M. Jessee. The smaller but similar unit led by Pete Everett also is noteworthy, and the two sometimes joined forces.

If their motivations are to be judged by their actions, Jessee’s men and other guerrillas primarily sought to hamstring the Union war effort through sabotage, as well as procure supplies for themselves and also the Confederate Army when practicable. On occasion some of them joined with regular Confederate units for campaigns, battles, or raids. These men frequently exacted revenge, most often in the form of armed robbery but sometimes torture or murder,
against Kentucky Unionists, whom they seemed to blame for keeping the Commonwealth out of the Confederacy. Additionally, they gunned down more than a few black recruits when such opportunities came their way. Mostly, they harassed lines of supply and communication, while tying up hundreds upon hundreds of mounted federal and state troops assigned to hunt them down and destroy them. Other units gained notoriety in the Bluegrass as the guerrilla war reached its zenith in late 1864 and early 1865. Among them were the combined followers of “One Armed” Berry and Sue Mundy, both of whom had ridden with Morgan on his final raid in Kentucky in 1864, and they would soon be joined by William Clarke Quantrill and his band.

By attempting to put Kentucky guerrillas into neat categories, one can easily appear to be trying to “clean up” the Civil War in the Commonwealth by differentiating the actions of legitimate Confederate units from those who robbed, raped, pillaged, and murdered hapless Kentuckians, black and white, throughout the 1860s. Evidence from the Bluegrass indicates that this guerrilla war cannot be sanitized or refined in such a manner. Categorization is useful, as is insight gleaned from previous studies on irregular and guerrilla warfare, but for the most part I have chosen to follow the lead of the sources in discussing the activities and actions of guerrillas, night riders, and Regulators in the Commonwealth, using the language of the authors of those sources with only occasional caveats. In short, I argue that the guerrilla war in Kentucky was, for the most part, a brutal, bloody affair, if not quite so intense as the guerrilla war in Missouri. Additionally, I argue that service as a wartime guerrilla provided excellent contacts and preparation for becoming a post-emancipation perpetrator of white terror.\(^3\)

The entwined legacies of post-emancipation racial violence and political assassination have resulted in long-term negative consequences for the Commonwealth and its residents, thus

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this study is very tightly focused on these important topics. Racial violence served to retard the process of emancipation as white supremacists forcibly maintained a rigid racial hierarchy after the destruction of slavery. This reign of terror not only limited the social, economic, and political opportunities of freedpeople, it also thwarted attempts by former slaves to establish independent identities as free black men, women, and families. Further, during this era political assassinations committed by individuals or groups who appear in many cases to have had the backing of elite factions, corporations, and possibly even state-wide political parties, became part and parcel of the political culture of the Commonwealth, resulting in a stigma and tradition for which subsequent generations of Kentuckians have paid a high price.

In chronicling social, racial, and political violence, I have made several assertions about the nature of violence as evidenced during this period and its relationship to the establishment of local and racial control following the demise of slavery. First, violence is an exercise in power and seldom truly random. Second, violence may be used in several ways to exercise power, e.g.: 1) violence may be employed to establish dominance; 2) violence may be employed to maintain control; 3) violence may be employed out of frustration due to loss, perceived or real, of control; 4) violence may be employed as retaliation for loss, perceived or real, of control, either over one’s own life or the lives of others; 5) violence may be employed in hopes, realistic or forlorn, of throwing off the yoke of power. Third, coercive intimidation, commonly referred to as a reign of terror, is a violent process. Fourth, acts of terror in this context are expressions of power, typically manifested against an individual or individuals for the purpose of establishing dominance or maintaining control over a larger group of which the targeted person or persons are representative. The fifth and final assertion is that in the subsequent struggle for dominance and control following an act or multiple acts of terror, violence may beget violence in a downward
spiral of retributive justice, with chaotic, long-lasting consequences that, among other things, contribute to the shaping of identity and memory.\(^4\)

Rather than attempt a generalized statewide survey, this study focuses primarily on counties actively served by the Lexington and Louisville sub-districts of the Kentucky district of the Freedmen’s Bureau. These two sub-districts operated from February 1866 until the Kentucky district was reorganized in mid 1868. Although subordinate field offices ebbed and flowed, at any one time the Lexington Sub-district maintained offices in Augusta, Covington, Cynthiana, Danville, Georgetown, Falmouth, Lexington, Maysville, Mt. Sterling, Nicholasville, Paris, Stanford, Versailles, and Winchester. Thus it actively served some twenty-seven surrounding counties, including Bath, Boone, Bourbon, Boyle, Bracken, Campbell, Carroll, Clark, Fayette, Fleming, Franklin, Gallatin, Garrard, Grant, Harrison, Jessamine, Kenton, Lincoln, Madison, Mason, Mercer, Montgomery, Nicholas, Owen, Pendleton, Scott, and Woodford. This study eliminates some twenty-five mountain counties included in but not actively served by the Lexington sub-district, primarily due to their very small pre-war slave populations.\(^5\)

The Louisville Sub-district included the Bluegrass counties of Anderson, Bullitt, Henry, Jefferson, Nelson, Oldham, Shelby, Spencer, and Trimble. It also included Hardin and LaRue, but because these two counties lie south of the Salt River, they have been dropped from this study. Although Marion and Washington counties technically were within the jurisdiction of the


\(^5\) Sidney S. Burbank to O. O. Howard, March 13, 1867, Registers and Letters Received by the Commissioner of the BRFAL, 1865-1872, National Archives Microfilm Publication M752 (hereinafter cited as R&LRC, BRFAL, [M752]), reel 42. As of March 1867, when Sidney Burbank assumed leadership of the Freedmen’s Bureau in Kentucky, the Lexington Sub-district included 51 counties, but 24 of them were mountain counties with small pre-war slave populations.
Central Sub-district, they have been included due to their location between Mercer and Boyle from the Lexington Sub-district and Nelson from the Louisville Sub-district. They are considered Bluegrass counties and numerous reports from military and Freedmen’s Bureau personnel make reference to activities within their borders, particularly Lebanon Junction in northern Marion County.\textsuperscript{6} Taken as a whole, these counties make for an interesting case study in large measure because of the size of their pre-war slave populations and political leanings.

The thirty-eight counties included in this study supported a total population of some 537,161 persons, according to the 1860 census, including a white population of 406,095, a free black population of 7,254, and a slave population of 123,812, with approximately forty-seven percent being under fifteen years of age. In 1860 slaves comprised only twenty percent of Kentucky’s population, but they comprised about twenty-three percent of the total population of the Bluegrass, and 20,991 of Kentucky’s slaveholders, well over fifty percent, lived in these counties.\textsuperscript{7} Within this society, many prominent political leaders still thought of themselves as Clay Whigs, and in 1860 their constituents more often than not voted for the party most overtly tied to preservation of the Union, with the understanding that slavery could best be protected within the framework of the Constitution. Still, once war became a reality, significant numbers of young men from the Bluegrass aligned themselves with the Confederacy, while many others over time became increasingly disillusioned with and embittered toward the Union.

This dissertation therefore presents the argument that, in the late antebellum period in Kentucky, changing economic and social realities placed white Kentuckians, elite and common,

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{7} 1860 county-level census data for Kentucky obtained online from the \textit{Historical United States Census Data Browser}, using data from The Eighth Census of the United States: 1860, compiled by the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, Ann Arbor, Michigan, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census/> (July 10, 2005).
at odds, one with another, as tension built over a number of issues, not the least of which was the future of slavery. These seeds of conflict came to full flower during the American Civil War. According to those who lived through it, a full-fledged guerrilla war raged through much of Kentucky in the mid-1860s. This conflict was clearly evidenced in the Bluegrass Region, particularly along avenues of commerce and supply such as rivers, railroads, and wagon roads, and it presented a daunting challenge to military commanders at both state and federal levels.

Adding to and taking advantage of the chaos in Civil War Era Kentucky, African Americans seized the initiative in what they deemed a struggle for liberation, negotiating their way through ambiguous and unevenly enforced federal policy relating to refugees and contrabands, finding opportunities to work for freedom even as they were pressed into labor for the federal war effort, and simply acting with their feet by running away when an opportunity presented itself. Finally, they volunteered in huge numbers, in many cases regardless of whether or not their owners granted permission, for the ranks of the United States Colored Troops. Still, Bluegrass slaveholders refused to accept the reality of slavery’s demise in the Commonwealth, even after the Thirteenth Amendment became law. Resistance to emancipation frequently came in the form of night-riding marauders. Though within the ranks were individual men prone to random acts of thievery, brutality, and racial violence, these were terrorist organizations, the heirs of proslavery night riders, who donned the chimera cloak of legitimacy by calling themselves citizen’s committees, Regulators, or simply Judge Lynch’s Men.

The southern fringe of the Bluegrass appears to have been the epicenter of this wave of mayhem. The agenda of self-proclaimed “Negro Regulators” varied from place to place and over time, but in many cases these bands not only served the political interests of the reunified Democratic Party, but also sought to acquire or secure for themselves a stronger economic and
social position in the Commonwealth than had been possible before emancipation. Their post-war status relied on the political support of Democrats at the local and state levels, and it came at the expense of formerly enslaved African Americans. Further, the social and economic status of the former slaveholding elite had been severely undermined by Civil War and emancipation. A new social and economic elite was just beginning to emerge, and though many of these men were scions of the old regime, they faced serious challenges if they hoped to establish a racial hierarchy similar to that in the antebellum period.

In this reordering of society, violence frequently erupted as competing factions struggled for control of communities and counties, particularly key elected offices connected to local law enforcement. Regulators functioned not as the romantic defenders of community norms or any sort of “paternalist moral economy,” but more as “an instrument of pressure, by persons ‘above’ or apart from the crowd.” Indeed, E. P. Thompson could have been describing these Bluegrass bands when he wrote that the “mobs” unleashed upon English Jacobins after 1792 “rarely involved more than a small group of picked hooligans.”

Reports of drunkenness among these “citizen’s committees” in Kentucky supports the notion that they frequently relied on liquid courage, but if they were hooligans, they were also heavily armed and well versed in guerrilla tactics. While seemingly having a good time at the expense of hapless freed people, they actually engaged in a terror campaign that served the purposes of individuals and groups operating above the fray. In sum, Regulators were more akin to antebellum slave patrols than to the bread-rioting women of Confederate Richmond, or even the draft rioters of New York City.

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If these bands of marauders were not universally led by or serving at the behest of elite citizens, certainly specific local factions, and in general the statewide Democratic Party, benefited from their activities, at least until these elites were forced to speak out against increasingly chaotic Regulator activity in attempts to legitimate their own status as proponents of law and order.

Coinciding with this Regulator-imposed reign of terror, a contest took place over the status of freedwomen and children living in urban settings and white households, as well as those living in black communities. The experiences of these women and children reflect the extreme hostility many Kentuckians, even some who fought for the Union, held toward freed people. In such an environment, where women and children daily experienced abuse at the hands of their employers and other white Kentuckians, the actions of Regulators could be rationalized and, to a degree, justified. Within such a political framework, men and women who justified whipping and otherwise abusing black women and children, either in a fit of anger or as a regular practice to maintain discipline over their laborers, could not overly criticize social and racial violence committed by bands of night riders that claimed to be operating in the best interests of their community. White Kentuckians in general and white urban-dwellers in particular refused to treat freedwomen as deserving of the same basic courtesies and the same level of respect and protection accorded to white women both in public and private settings. As a result, free black women frequently fell victim not only to white men who dealt them insults and beatings, but also to perpetrators of rape and murder.

In fear and frustration over post-emancipation violence, large numbers of freed people fled the state in the years between 1865 and 1871. Outnumbered more than five to one by white residents by 1870, those who were left behind frequently had little ability to enjoy their freedom, mostly due to the politics of white supremacy. By the early 1870s, though in theory they had
been granted equal rights and equal protection under the law, black men and women in the Commonwealth had, for the most part, failed to achieve the level of freedom they desired. The success with which white supremacists utilized violence to resist and overcome what they deemed federal interference in state affairs is most clearly evidenced in the political, legal and extra-legal attack on the Kentucky branch of the Freedmen’s Bureau. White supremacists and their political allies, with Regulators as their shock troops, effectively thwarted federal attempts to enable freed people in Kentucky to experience full rights of citizenship and, in many cases, to build independent lives for themselves and their families. As a result, emancipation in Kentucky, if not a failure, achieved only limited success in meeting the hopes and expectations of the emancipated.

This *de facto* rehearsal for the process by which Confederate states would “redeem” themselves from Reconstruction governments and federal interference hinged on the critical state election of 1867, in which wartime governor and self-proclaimed Conservative Union candidate Thomas Bramlette would be defeated by even more conservative Democrats and their ex-Confederate allies. On the eve of this election, and as the culmination of a wave of Regulator violence in the vicinity of Lincoln County, James H. Bridgewater was assassinated by a group of citizens from nearby Crab Orchard. Because his story so poignantly reveals the plight of Kentucky Unionists, as well as the escalation of community violence during and after the war, it is interwoven throughout this dissertation.

Bridgewater served as an officer in both the Union Army and the Unionist Home Guard during the Civil War, gaining fame as a guerrilla hunter. At the time of his death he was employed by the Internal Revenue Service to investigate tax fraud. Additionally, in the spring of 1867 he had served briefly as an investigator for the Freedmen’s Bureau, using his local
connections to ferret out the identities of area Regulators, including the Crab Orchard Gang. He concluded that these marauders were almost to a man former Confederates and anti-Union guerrillas. Their leader, Walter G. Saunders, is still remembered as the man who killed Bridgewater, a claim that got him elected Lincoln County sheriff in 1870.

Though it had never seceded, Kentucky had undergone a seismic identity shift between 1862 and 1867. Loyalists such as Bridgewater found themselves strangers in their own neighborhoods as former Confederates and their anti-federal allies quickly gained political control over much of Kentucky after the war. Partisan editors, chiefly Walter Haldeman of the Louisville *Daily Courier*, dictated the Democratic Party line by portraying Bridgewater and other Unionists as malcontents and even common outlaws. He made it clear that the deaths of Bridgewater and others of his ilk were necessary if law and order were to return to Kentucky. In the state election of 1867, Democrats overwhelmingly defeated Unionists, due in large measure to widespread political violence and intimidation. With this victory, which included the election of numerous ex-Confederates to local and state offices, Kentucky’s Civil War era identity shift from a prewar western state to a wartime border state to a postwar southern state appears to have been completed. This southern identity quickly became so deeply entrenched, so widely assumed to have been the dominant identity from early statehood onward, that to challenge this assumption seems invariably to lead to a heated argument, even among, or perhaps I should say, especially among fellow historians.10

10 For a comparative discussion of this identity shift in Kentucky and Missouri, see Christopher Phillips, “‘The Chrysalis State’: Slavery, Confederate Identity, and the Creation of the Border South,” in *Inside the Confederate Nation: Essays in Honor of Emory M. Thomas*, edited by Lesley J. Gordon and John C. Inscoe (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 147-164. In brief, Phillips argues that bitterness toward the federal government, particularly over emancipation, caused white Kentuckians to shift, for the most part, from a pre-war western identity to a post-war southern identity. For a point of view somewhat at odds with both Coulter
Despite the victory of a party that campaigned largely on law and order, these ideals proved elusive in the Commonwealth throughout the decades following 1867. Indeed, the Democratic Party failed to achieve political legitimacy in large measure due to its inability to rein in Regulators. Far from merely targeting freed people due to overt racism, these marauders targeted anyone and everyone who stood in the way of their local agendas. The first years of the new Democratic regime were among the bloodiest in Kentucky history, deeply marred by social and political violence. Politicians may have ruled the day, but Regulators ruled the night, and by the late 1860s, the two groups were at odds, one with another, setting the stage for decades of political violence and assassination, the legacy of which continues to haunt the Commonwealth. As historian Steven A. Channing phrased it, “Once the cycle of retribution and vigilantism was set in motion, it was difficult to stop. Each act of mob justice made it easier for the next.”

This, then, is the interwoven story of guerrilla warfare and the struggle over the meaning of freedom in Civil War Era Kentucky. While it focuses on the post-emancipation plight of black men and women in the Bluegrass, it gives much attention to those white Kentuckians like Bridgewater who sought to aid them in this struggle. The title was inspired by Willie Lee Rose’s *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: the Port Royal Experiment* (1976). If Port Royal was a rehearsal for Reconstruction, for both good and ill, then so, too, may Kentucky’s experience be seen as a rehearsal for the process of southern “redemption” from Republican rule. There are fundamental differences, in that Kentucky never truly experienced Republican rule, let alone Radical Reconstruction, but the Commonwealth had been subjected to martial law during the war and a degree of military governance many of its residents found unacceptable. Most significantly,

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slaveholders in this “loyal” border state had lost, in their minds at the hand of the federal government, that which they sought to maintain with their loyalty: the institution of slavery. In both cases, the crux of the issue lay with perceptions of federal interference in state and local affairs, particularly interference with both slavery and the post-emancipation politics of white supremacy. White Kentuckians certainly did not hesitate to equate their plight with that of the former Confederate states, and neither should we hesitate to compare their violent response to federal policy with that of their new-found southern brethren.

This dissertation may be differentiated from much of the historiography upon which it is founded, and yet that foundation is vital, if it is to stand on its own. In particular, this study rests on the primary source documents and analytical essays found in the Freedmen and Southern Society’s ongoing series *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867* (1982-). These publications help flesh out the story of wartime Kentucky regarding the demise of slavery, the transition of Bluegrass slaves from un-free to wage laborers, and the vital contributions made and social upheavals caused, either directly or indirectly, by black soldiers. Additionally, this study could not stand without support from the scholarship of Marion B. Lucas and George C. Wright. Lucas’s *A History of Blacks in Kentucky, Volume 1: From Slavery to Segregation, 1760-1891* (1992), has proven indispensable, as have his numerous articles. And George Wright quite simply provided the motivation for this project, in that he issued a clear call for a new generation of historians to tackle the subject of Kentucky during Reconstruction. His monograph, *Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940: Lynchings, Mob Rule, and “Legal Lynchings”* (1990), left many questions unanswered about motivations behind attacks against African Americans in the first decade after the Civil War, though it left absolutely no doubt as to the veracity of the numerous reports of such violence, as well as the extent to which state
legitimacy eventually came to hinge on appeasement of white supremacists at the expense of black Kentuckians.

Finally, I should note that I have chosen to distance myself somewhat from Victor B. Howard’s *Black Liberation in Kentucky: Emancipation and Freedom, 1862-1884* (1983), excited though I was when first I happened upon it. Howard almost certainly perceived his monograph as a much-needed corrective for the blatant racial bias of E. Merton Coulter’s *The Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky* (1926), a goal he marginally achieved. My study is not designed to replace either of these monographs. Though we often utilize the same sources, my organization and interpretation for the most part differ markedly from Howard’s. As for Coulter, I doubt that any future historian will ever be as knowledgeable concerning the contents of Ohio Valley Civil War Era newspapers as he was, and so his monograph remains informative and useful when properly interrogated in light of much more recent scholarship. Still, both Coulter and Howard failed to understand the intimate relationship between Kentucky’s guerrilla war and the contest over the meaning of freedom raging in the Commonwealth in the 1860s. As for the goals of my own study and how well they have been achieved, for good or ill, *res ipsa loquitur.*
The seeds of Civil War Era conflict in the Bluegrass were planted during the antebellum period and thrived in a climate characterized by rapidly changing social and economic conditions as well as tension over slavery and its future. Indeed, such factors may have brought James H. Bridgewater and his brothers into conflict with their Lincoln County neighbors. Violence at the local level, including at least one documented lynching, seems to have set the stage for escalating conflict in this geographically diverse county, intensified, to say the least, by the American Civil War. Thus in some ways Lincoln may be viewed as a microcosm of Kentucky’s wartime experience. Far from anomalies, and far more complex than stereotypical family feuds, local contests over political control and maintenance of the antebellum social order flared up throughout the Commonwealth, including the Bluegrass Region and particularly its fringe counties such as Madison and Lincoln.

Sometime after his birth in 1835, young James H. Bridgewater moved with his family from Virginia to Lincoln County, Kentucky. Numerous push/pull factors motivated individual families to pull up stakes in the Old South and head for the West. The Bridgewaters, like most migrants to Kentucky, seem to have been looking for new opportunities, and they chose a community somewhat isolated from Kentucky’s well-established centers of slaveholding. The family settled in Highland, south of Hall’s Gap, the traditional southern terminus of the Bluegrass Region. The steep, heavily wooded knobs and hills of southern Lincoln County, from
which flow the headwaters of the Green and Salt rivers, stand in stark contrast to the rolling hills of the southern Bluegrass just a few miles to the north. On those slopes, economic success would come only through hard, dangerous work felling trees and skidding logs, not from mixed-crop farming with assistance from slave labor, and certainly not from cultivating tobacco or hemp. Whatever the reasons for their decision to settle in Highland, the Bridgewater family’s choice of location apparently set the stage for conflict between their sons and numerous white residents of northern Lincoln County, where, like most of the Bluegrass Region, economic success was closely aligned with slave labor, if not necessarily slave ownership.¹

The intriguing geology of the Bluegrass Region has been well chronicled, but a brief description is in order. Sitting astride the Cincinnati Arch, this area is carved by the Licking, Kentucky, and Salt Rivers. Its long, winding northern and western boundary is the Ohio River, into which the Licking, Kentucky, and Salt flow. The Salt River serves as a traditional boundary to the southwest, as does Hall’s Gap to the south, but the Bluegrass really only ends when the southern fringe of knobs gives way to the Mississippian Plateaus. The Pottsville Escarpment, on the other hand, serves as a well-defined boundary for the region to the east and southeast. This region is characterized by rolling plateau country, with the Inner Bluegrass being a bit more level and the Outer being definitely rougher around the edges. The soil is fertile throughout, with a limestone foundation never far beneath the surface and abundant sources of fresh water.² By 1860, the Bluegrass was heavily populated, heavily cultivated, and in some cases industrialized.

Though on the southern fringe, Lincoln County, home to William Whitley’s famous brick house and the first oval horseracing track in the Commonwealth, was socially and politically connected to what one historian has dubbed the “Bluegrass System” during the antebellum period. Henry Clay’s Bluegrass System was the antecedent of his American System, and it entailed the “wedding of public and private interests...to exploit fully the resources of the trans-Appalachian West.” Clay’s political economy emphasized improved transportation, local manufacturing, and standardized banking, with the aim of establishing Lexington as an “integrated center of agriculture, commerce, and manufacturing.” His system was implemented by a core group of Inner Bluegrass lawyers, merchants, and planters who stood to gain most from it, and it depended heavily on slave labor to improve the farms and fields on which cash crops might be grown. Though in the antebellum period this region was not a major exporter of tobacco, it easily yielded bounties of cash crops such as corn, wheat, flax, and hemp, as well as being ideal for raising hogs, cows, and horses. Enslaved blacks and poor whites, particularly those who were homesteading or “squatting,” had the most to lose from such a system, as they would have either no or limited opportunities for owning land.3

Clay’s system dominated most Inner Bluegrass counties, but as populations swelled in outlying counties, local control, not necessarily connection to a larger system, became a major point of contestation. This was especially true after the ratification of the Third Constitution in 1850, which, while assuring the perpetuity of slavery in the Commonwealth, also granted increased political power to counties by allowing local voters to choose their own judges.4 In

counties not dominated by a single group of elites, such as the infamous Clay County to the southwest of the Bluegrass, this increased power led to open, often violent conflict between competing factions. But in Lincoln and other fringe counties, a controlling elite faction with ties to the Inner Bluegrass had already emerged and, for the most part, held key local offices, including magistrates, constables, and county sheriff. Thus any challenge to this dominant group would have to begin with agitation from the bottom up, possibly aided by outside influences, with the hope of acquiring at least a few local elite allies or sponsors along the way.

Lincoln County, though connected to the Inner Bluegrass, offered more diverse economic opportunities. James Bridgewater, along with his two brothers, Augden, who was older, and John, who was younger, sought to capitalize on the growing market for lumber, a market driven by railroad expansion and urban growth in the Ohio Valley. According to the 1860 census, James, who had married Susan Dawes in 1854, listed his occupation as “laborer.” The manufacturing census from that year indicates that Augden ran a sawmill; therefore one may speculate that James worked for his older brother in the lumber business. The presence by 1860 of several steam-powered sawmills in southern Lincoln County clearly indicates an emerging lumber industry that no doubt supplied crossties for Bluegrass railroad projects in addition to basic construction material for houses, barns, warehouses, wagons, barrels, and other local needs. Lumber likely would have been hauled overland north from Hall’s Gap perhaps all the way to the Dicks River, passing through the county seat of Stanford along the way. Either through economic or social connections, or both, James made contact with some leading citizens of Stanford. As a measure of the respect he must have earned from these elites, on September 9, 1861, he became a Freemason in the Stanford Lodge. Despite their secret rituals and vows of

loyalty, members of this lodge would struggle to maintain harmony as many of them chose sides and fought against each other during the American Civil War.\(^5\)

In antebellum Kentucky, as in much of America, “Judge Lynch” already ruled from time to time. As demonstrated by the Madison County committee of night riders, communities in the southern Bluegrass and elsewhere did not hesitate to take what they perceived to be justice into their own hands when the existing legal system in their opinion failed to, or was too slow to, serve it. In addition to threats, actual lynching often served as a key component of a given community’s “legal culture,” which can be defined as “concepts and habits of justice as well as understandings of the role and potency of formal and informal rules, rights, and authority.” By the late antebellum period, Americans had come to accept that communities were justified in such acts of violence when the extant legal system failed to serve justice as an individual community understood it. Thus understandings of community norms, not necessarily regional or national issues, dictated the use of vigilante justice throughout the 1850s. And yet that very acceptance of communities’ rights to serve such justice gave lynching too much legitimacy, resulting in a long era of social and political violence that became a national disgrace and a lingering nightmare, particularly for African Americans.\(^6\)

When such acts of vigilantism pitted one political faction or one community against another, the stage was set for an escalating pattern of retributive justice that later generations tended to romanticize as a feud. Such romanticizing, while sometimes a salve on the still-

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healing wounds of given communities, did little to aid in the understanding of their root causes. Historians and social scientists now generally agree that most of these feuds resulted from social and economic transformation brought on by penetration of market forces into rural society. In Clay County, for example, much of the early conflict in what came to be called the Clay County Wars centered on control of the vital, highly profitable salt industry. In turn, as salt brought both new prosperity and opportunity, a contest ensued for control over the all-important county offices, particularly those of judge and sheriff. Because this conflict involved two established groups of elites, neither of which could completely supplant the other, it led to nearly a century of instability in Clay County, punctuated by frequent outbreaks of violence and characterized by economic stagnation.\(^7\)

In Lincoln County, it is reasonable to speculate that the emergence of timber as a new type of cash crop may have been part of a social transformation that challenged the ruling elite and its slave-dependent economic system. Within this context of conflict brought on by social change, lynching would have served as a way for those in power to resist such change, particularly if couched in the language of defense of community norms and traditions, including defense of the all-important institution of slavery. However, what seemed legitimate to those who at least tacitly supported lynching no doubt constituted a grave injustice in the eyes of victims’ families, friends, and allies. According to one of its most notorious participants, late antebellum conflict at the local level helped set the stage for open warfare and a violent pattern of retributive justice in Lincoln and surrounding counties during and after the Civil War. In a post-war letter, James Bridgewater noted that a lynching in 1858, in which a man from Highland

had been taken from jail and hanged by a large mob from the northern part of the county, had served to open a rift between the northern and southern sections of Lincoln County. Though he gave only sparse details, Bridgewater cited this lynching as the beginning of a struggle for control of his county that grew both in scale and violence over the next decade.  

By 1860 Lincoln had a population of 10,647, including 3,430 slaves, 158 free blacks, and 7,059 white persons, of whom only 103 were foreign born. The southern section of the county was sparsely populated, and so sheer weight of numbers gave county control to voters in the northern, Bluegrass section. To the east, Crab Orchard, a rest stop on the old Wilderness Road from the Cumberland Gap, was a successful resort community, surrounded by rolling hills covered with orchards and pastures. Stanford and several smaller towns nearby, including Hustonville, provided trading centers and employment opportunities for laborers, skilled artisans and craftsmen, merchants, and a small professional elite of lawyers, physicians, and teachers. These towns were surrounded by small to midsized farms on which the majority of the county’s residents, including most slaves, lived and worked. Like most Bluegrass counties, Lincoln was a home to families, some 1,240, with total numbers of males and females being nearly equal among both free and slave. Lincoln, like nearby Madison, was also home to a large number of enslaved children, with fifty percent of its enslaved population being under fifteen years of age. Because it straddles the traditional southern terminus of the region, Lincoln is sometimes excluded from lists of Bluegrass counties, but in 1860 it certainly functioned as one.

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8 J. H. Bridgewater to R. E. Johnston, June 8, 1867, Letters Received, Entry 1068. Assistant Commissioner’s Office (hereinafter cited as LRACO), Kentucky District, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105 (hereinafter cited as BRFAL-KY) (National Archives, Washington, D.C). For more on Madison nightriders, see William E. Ellis, H. E. Everman, and Richard D. Sears, Madison County: 200 Years in Retrospect, (Richmond, KY: Madison County Historical Society, 1985), 145-175.
9 Manuscript Returns, Eighth Census, 1860, Lincoln County, KDLA.
Farmers in Lincoln County primarily grew staples such as wheat, corn, oats, and potatoes. Most farmers owned working teams of oxen, and most farm holdings included milk and beef cows, swine, and sheep. Wool would have had cash value, as Kentucky’s textile industry by this time had achieved fame for its rugged wool jeans. A few residents appear to have specialized in breeding horses, asses, and prized Kentucky mules. Several residents operated distilleries, no doubt producing bourbon from their neighbors’ surplus corn and grain. Lincoln County boasted 496 slaveholders, and most of these men were also counted among the county’s 657 farmers. None of them owned as many as forty slaves, with the majority owning five or fewer. Additionally, 425 men listed their occupation as laborer. Taken as a whole, these numbers are consistent with averages throughout the Bluegrass Region. In addition to helping explain the region’s commitment to slavery, the numbers suggest the possibility for tensions between slaveholders and non-slaveholding laborers, as well as potential future conflicts between newly freed slaves and white laborers who now had to compete with them for jobs, land, and patronage with landholders, merchants, and other economic and political leaders.\(^\text{10}\)

The thirty-eight counties included in this study supported a total population of some 537,161 persons, according to the 1860 census, including a white population of 406,095, a free black population of 7,254, and a slave population of 123,812. The census listed 62,101 males and 61,711 females as enslaved persons, with approximately forty-seven percent being under fifteen years of age. In 1860 slaves comprised only twenty percent of Kentucky’s population, but they comprised about twenty-three percent of the total population of the Bluegrass. Still, ninety-six percent of slaveholders in this region owned less than twenty slaves, with nearly sixty-

\(^{10}\) Ibid.; 1860 county-level census data for Kentucky obtained online from the Historical United States Census Data Browser, using data from The Eighth Census of the United States: 1860, compiled by the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, Ann Arbor, Michigan, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census/> (July 10, 2005).
three percent owning five or fewer. Most slaves worked on mixed crop farms, not plantations. For example, Fayette County, the hub on which the Inner Bluegrass turned, had a population of 22,599, with 10,015 slaves, yet of the twelve hundred slaveholders in Fayette, only six owned fifty or more slaves, and less than one hundred owned twenty or more. Indeed, of the approximately 20,991 slaveholders living in the counties encompassed in this study, only twenty-five planters owned fifty or more slaves, with 802 owning twenty or more.¹¹

Slaves, though widely dispersed among slaveholders, were unevenly divided among counties. Fayette and Jefferson had more than ten thousand slaves each, while Bourbon, Madison, Nelson, Scott, Shelby, and Woodford all had over five thousand slaves each and Clark had just under that number. On the other hand, Bracken, Campbell, Gallatin, Grant, Kenton, Pendleton, and Trimble had less than one thousand each. Still, a majority of counties in this study, like Lincoln, had slave populations at or above the average of twenty-three percent, including Bourbon, Boyle, Clark, Fayette, Franklin (home county to Frankfort, the state capital), Garrard, Harrison, Jessamine, Lincoln, Madison, Marion, Mercer, Montgomery, Nelson, Oldham, Scott, Shelby, Spencer, Washington, and Woodford. Given this sizable enslaved population and its importance to the region’s economy, coupled with increasingly strict limits designed to thwart opportunities for upward mobility toward freedom on the part of slaves, the Bluegrass Region appeared to be thoroughly committed to maintaining the peculiar institution.¹²

As with any similar society, treatment of individuals varied with the dispositions and whims of those who owned them. Slaves who worked hemp in the Inner Bluegrass typically had the most difficult existence, performing tasks deemed too strenuous and menial for free white

¹² Ibid.
laborers. A great many Bluegrass slaves worked on mixed-crop farms for small-scale owners, where work could vary dramatically from day to day, season to season, and farm to farm. Most male slaves likely did field work, often in close proximity to owners who had to pull their share of the load to make ends meet, but a significant number of hired-out males worked in manufacturing and service positions in urban centers throughout the Bluegrass. A large number of female slaves were hired out to serve as domestic help in both rural and urban areas. A few noteworthy slaves became highly respected participants in horseracing.13

Ironically Jefferson, with the second largest slave population in the Bluegrass, had a total population of only about twelve percent slaves due to Louisville’s large urban population, including most of the 26,120 foreign-born white persons and 2,007 free black persons listed as living in the county. Jefferson was far and away the most urban of Kentucky’s counties in 1860, and also had the largest concentration of manufacturing, based both on number of manufacturing establishments and annual value of products. Kenton, with the vital river port and railhead of Covington, ranked second in the Bluegrass both in terms of urban population and manufacturing output. Tied for third in manufacturing were Mason, home county to Maysville; and Fayette, home county to Lexington. In Mason, nearly four out of five residents were white, with most of the county’s 3,772 slaves working on corn or tobacco farms, as opposed to a near black majority in Fayette, a part of which, whether slave or free, worked as hired laborers in Lexington factories. Of the remaining counties, Bourbon, Boyle, Franklin, Harrison, Jessamine, Madison,

Marion, Nelson, Scott, and Woodford reported significant levels of manufacturing in 1860, while Bath, Montgomery, and Oldham produced very few manufactured products.\textsuperscript{14}

Maysville, Newport, and Lexington merit some qualification in terms of their positions in 1860. As a river port, Maysville benefited greatly from the introduction of the steamboat and enjoyed a manufacturing boom in the late antebellum period. While Louisville and Covington benefited greatly from the Louisville & Nashville and Kentucky Central railroads, respectively, Maysville had strong economic ties with Ohio and Pennsylvania, as well as traditional economic connections southwest along the pike through Carlisle and Paris to Lexington. Maysville’s home county of Mason had a very small foreign-born population (1,469) when compared to Kenton (7,135) and Campbell (6,231), counties heavily influenced economically, culturally, and socially by their close proximity to Cincinnati. Not coincidentally, Mason had a much larger percentage of slaves than did Kenton and Campbell, and this county would witness high levels of racial violence as emancipation became law in 1865. Kenton, on the other hand, would be the recipient of a flood of refugees fleeing to Covington from such violence in the surrounding countryside, particularly neighboring Boone County. Campbell County, home to Newport, had the region’s third largest foreign-born population and was a center of textile production in antebellum Kentucky, with several factories weaving various types of cloth, utilizing fibers from hemp and flax as well as wool and cotton. However, financial setbacks had produced something of a manufacturing lull by 1860. For its part, Lexington was the center of Kentucky’s hemp industry, which was concentrated in Bourbon, Fayette, Jessamine, Scott, and Woodford counties. Mired as it was in rigid social and economic relationships based on slavery, Lexington had been outclassed economically by both Louisville and Covington, though one would have been hard

pressed to convince the city’s social elite of this reality. Still, Fayette County employed almost as many wage laborers in manufacturing as did Kenton. Factories around Lexington primarily manufactured hemp cording and rope, along with hemp bagging that was used to bale cotton.15

Most of the Bluegrass was farm and pastureland, and most farms were of the small, mixed-crop variety. Among cash crops, corn, wheat, flax, and hemp were the most important. Flax yielded not only fiber for cloth but also fodder and linseed oil, and area residents seeking medicine found hemp products on the shelves of their local trading posts. Similarly, corn and wheat were not merely for eating, but also needed for making sour-mash whiskey. Once most of the alcohol had been distilled from it, sour mash served to fatten area hogs for market. Within this diverse agricultural economy, there were few farms that compared with the plantations of the cotton South. Of the 29,949 farms in the thirty-eight counties in this study, fifty-five percent were less than 100 acres in size, and ninety-seven percent were less than 500 acres. While many counties boasted a farm or two over a thousand acres, only Bourbon (11), Clark (9), Fayette (12), Garrard (7), Madison (15), and Shelby (9) had more than a half dozen such farms.16

Bourbon, Fayette, and Jefferson counties boasted the highest cash value of farms, with Anderson, Bullitt, Gallatin, Pendleton, and Trimble having the lowest. Residents of Boone, Bourbon, Fayette, Fleming, Harrison, Henry, Jefferson, Madison, Mason, Mercer, Nelson, Scott, Shelby, and Woodford had over a hundred thousand dollars per county invested in farming implements and machinery, while only Carroll, Gallatin, and Trimble had less than fifty

thousand dollars similarly invested. Its unparalleled pastures easily made Bourbon County the livestock capital of the region in 1860, but Boone, Clark, Fayette, Garrard, Harrison, Lincoln, Madison, Mason, Nelson, Scott, Shelby, Washington, and Woodford all boasted per county livestock values of over a million dollars. Similarly, Jefferson easily outclassed the rest of the region in terms of orchard products, but Boone, Bourbon, Boyle, Clark, Fayette, Fleming, Garrard, Henry, Kenton, Madison, Mason, Montgomery, Nelson, Oldham, and Shelby each produced more than ten thousand dollars’ worth of products from their orchards. Additionally, Jefferson led the way in total value of market garden products, with Campbell and Kenton a distant second and third. Of the other counties, only Fayette and Mason sent significant amounts of garden products to market. All counties in this study had significant levels of homemade manufacturing, as well as significant total value of animals slaughtered.\footnote{Ibid.}

Antebellum cotton planters coveted central Kentucky’s hemp products and its bluegrass-fed horses and mules, as well as various food items and durable work clothes produced in the Commonwealth. Additionally, the Bluegrass was home to a thriving trade in slaves, most of whom were sold “down the river” to markets in Memphis, Natchez, and New Orleans. The large number of enslaved children in Kentucky would lead one to believe that, had not the Civil War come along, this slave trade would have been very brisk for many years to come. These ties to the southern cotton economy bound many residents of central Kentucky, including Lexington hemp baron John Hunt Morgan and his associates, to the Confederate cause. Yet even though the hemp industry had strong connections to the South, other farmers and manufacturers in the Bluegrass depended on northern markets for their crops and products. The rail connection from Nicholasville north through Lexington to Covington via the Kentucky Central Railroad allowed
for transportation to markets in Cincinnati and as far away as Philadelphia and Buffalo. Additionally, trains and riverboats brought northern and northwestern commodities and manufactured goods to a ready market in central Kentucky. Though some merchants no doubt were loath to lose valuable trade with the South, most residents in the river ports of Louisville, Covington, Newport, and Maysville showed little interest in leaving the Union, particularly Covington and Newport, due to their close ties to Cincinnati. On the whole, when a majority of the residents of the Bluegrass sided with the Union during the secession crisis, they acted not only in keeping with the legacy of Henry Clay but also in their own economic interests, a trend further indicated by voting patterns in counties with large slave populations.18

Rejecting the Republican Party out of hand, the entire Commonwealth only recorded 1364 votes for Abraham Lincoln in the presidential election of 1860. Democrats were the controlling party in Kentucky by the mid 1850s, but many of them feared that a vote for a Southern Democratic candidate would equate to a vote for secession. Of the approximately 78,794 Kentuckians who voted for a Democratic candidate, 25,651, or nearly one third, voted for Stephen A. Douglas, who represented the northern wing of the party, instead of Kentucky native John C. Breckinridge, who represented the southern wing of the party. Among Bluegrass counties, Douglas made a strong showing in those with large Roman Catholic populations, including a majority of votes in Marion and Washington and a plurality of votes in Nelson and Campbell. He finished second to Bell in Jefferson and Kenton, garnering just over thirty-six percent of the more than thirteen thousand votes cast in those two counties. With Democratic votes thus split, Constitutional Unionist candidate John Bell of Tennessee carried Kentucky with

66,058 votes, a plurality but a clear victory. He received strong support in Bluegrass counties, particularly those with large slave populations. Specifically, of the twenty-five counties in this study with two thousand or more slaves in 1860, Bell won a majority in Bourbon, Boyle, Clark, Fayette, Garrard, Jefferson, Jessamine, Lincoln, Mason, Montgomery, Shelby, and Woodford; and a plurality in Fleming, Madison, Oldham, and Spencer. Breckinridge won a majority only in Bath, Franklin, Harrison, Mercer, and Scott; and a plurality in Henry. This region featured many prominent political leaders who still thought of themselves as Clay Whigs, and their constituents voted for the party most overtly tied to preservation of the Union, with the understanding that slavery could best be protected within the framework of the Constitution.19

Alongside of numerous ambitious slaveholders, the Bluegrass featured highly active abolitionists. Delia Webster and the Reverend Calvin Fairbanks, an anti-slavery Methodist minister, worked to help slaves escape in the 1840s, but eventually both were arrested for freeing slaves and served time in the Frankfort penitentiary. John G. Fee, who, with Cassius Marcellus Clay’s support, established an abolitionist community and biracial college on Berea Ridge in Madison County, reportedly was threatened nearly two dozen times by angry groups of Kentuckians. By 1860 Berea’s doors were closed, its leaders in exile, and the supporters of slavery reigned politically triumphant throughout the region. That this community and college had been established at all is a testament to the will and faith of the men and women who helped

found it, but faith alone could not stand up to the work of citizens’ committees to undermine their experiment. Indeed, in terms of belief, most churchgoing residents of the Bluegrass were either Baptist or Methodist, and after the 1840s their congregations typically aligned themselves with the southern, proslavery factions of those denominations.20

Despite the militant resistance to abolition demonstrated at Berea and elsewhere, Kentucky as a whole did not follow the Upper South into the Confederacy in 1861. Special elections held in the summer of 1861 allowed Unionists to consolidate their political power in the state, as a great many of its slaveholders were reluctant to enter into the growing national conflict. Declaring strict neutrality, Kentucky’s political leaders, including Governor Magoffin, sought to keep the war out of the Commonwealth, as well as to keep the peace within their borders. Unlike the Upper South states of Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee, Unionist Kentuckians did not see this as an either/or choice between seceding or actively suppressing secession. Instead, these Unionists saw themselves as mediators between the hostile parties. If such a policy of neutrality was doomed to fail, it proved widely popular, as evidenced by the summer’s election results.21

Additionally, these Unionist slaveholders feared, as numerous anti-secession editors throughout the upper tier of slave states had suggested for many months, that secession would surely lead to the destruction of the Union as they knew it, and possibly the institution of slavery as well. On the other hand, preserving the Union would allow proslavery advocates in Congress


and the Supreme Court to rein in this upstart Republican president from Illinois. Kentucky politicians such as John J. Crittenden, a native of Woodford County, and even Democratic Governor Beriah Magoffin, from Mercer County, tried their utmost to prevent a sectional conflict, proposing compromises and peace plans to no avail. As for Kentucky secessionists, representatives from some sixty-eight counties met and adopted an ordinance of secession in Russellville, Logan County, on November 20, 1861. Though Kentucky as a whole never seceded, Confederate flags bore stars for both Kentucky and Missouri, and during his 1862 invasion, Confederate General Bragg would pause in Frankfort to oversee the inauguration of a Confederate governor for the Commonwealth. Still, Bragg’s hope of raising a new corps of Confederate Kentuckians during that campaign would prove forlorn.22

For its part, the Lincoln administration deemed Kentucky too valuable to allow it to remain neutral for long. In 1860, the Commonwealth had ranked ninth in the Union in population, not to mention fifth in value of livestock, seventh in value of farms, and fifteenth in value of manufacturing. Additionally, individual Kentuckians themselves were quickly choosing sides, and so the Lincoln administration felt it had no time to waste. Early in the war, the Kentucky State Guard fell under suspicion as a pro-Confederate organization. Some Unionists feared a Guard-backed Southern Rights coup in Frankfort. To counter this adequately organized, armed, and drilled militia, a rag-tag Unionist Home Guard was established, and a frantic race ensued to get weapons into the hands of Home Guardsmen. The federal government slipped several thousand muskets, dubbed “Lincoln guns”, into the state for this purpose. Though this

22 Harrison and Klotter, New History of Kentucky, 185-186. See John Alan Boyd, “Neutrality and Peace: Kentucky and the Secession Crisis of 1861” (Ph.D. diss., University of Kentucky, 1999), for a detailed political history of Kentucky during the Secession Crisis, including analysis as to how and why the Commonwealth’s Unionists were able to consolidate their hold on the state in the spring and summer of 1861, even as the Upper South states of Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina seceded.
action angered many Kentuckians and no doubt pushed some, including a number of State Guardsmen, into the arms of the Confederacy, it allowed Unionists to begin the process of securing Kentucky for the Union. Thus from the beginning of the war Kentucky had numerous armed, organized, relatively independent bands of men, many of whom appear to have been itching for a fight. Eventually, with the consolidation of power by Unionists and the help of federal authorities, the Unionist Home Guard replaced the old State Guard, though many units retained their highly independent nature, often to the frustration of both Kentucky’s adjutant general and federal military authorities.23

Throughout the Bluegrass Region, hard decisions had to be made regarding both military service and the fate of slavery. In Frankfort, Leonard Streiff, who labeled himself a German by birth but an American citizen from choice, made an appeal “to the Germans of Kentucky.” In short, he called for them to side unconditionally with the Union: “follow its fortunes and its flag wherever they go, and proudly share their fate.”24 Numerous Kentucky Unionists crossed the Ohio during the first months of the war to join companies being organized at mustering points bearing familiar names such as Camp Clay and Camp Jo Holt. Initially, military and political leaders defended such mustering, arguing that it was nothing more than a necessary measure by which to protect Kentucky’s interests, but in short order hundreds upon hundreds of sons of the Commonwealth became soldiers for the Union cause, regardless of Kentucky’s official stance. By late spring, the Lincoln administration recognized the need to recruit actively within the state, which would require camps for recruiting, equipping, training, and supplying these new regiments. In May 1861 a military department of Kentucky was organized, and in August, Maysville’s own William “Bull” Nelson established a Union recruiting camp in Garrard County,

24 Louisville Journal, June 11, 1861.
Camp Dick Robinson. At the same time, large numbers of young men from the Bluegrass chose an alternative path and headed south to Camp Boone in northern Tennessee to enlist in the Confederate Army. As Confederate and Union armies began to take up strategic positions in western Kentucky, valuing military necessity over interstate diplomacy, the Commonwealth’s neutral position became untenable, if indeed it had ever been otherwise. Still, many young men cast their vote for neutrality in another way simply by not volunteering for either army.25

Even as free Kentuckians sorted out what the war might mean for them, numerous enslaved Kentuckians engaged in a high-stakes gambit by running away under cover of the chaos of war. While some rushed to urban centers, particularly those along the Ohio, others fled to recruitment centers such as Camp Dick Robinson. Some of these runaways were turned away by camp sentries or returned to their owners, while others slipped in, or were taken in, and covertly found work in camp with individuals and companies, being hired in defiance of federal military policy at the time. Some Union soldiers openly defied Bluegrass slaveholders, even going so far as to smuggle runaways to freedom north of the Ohio. Soldiers serving in regiments from Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin, and elsewhere, as well as some members of Kentucky regiments, appear to have intentionally violated both federal and state laws regarding fugitive slaves while stationed in Kentucky during the first two years of the war.26

In Lincoln County, while numerous young men headed south to join the Confederate Army, Unionists formed a volunteer militia company and elected officers. On October 8, 1861, this company was mustered into service as part of the 3rd Kentucky Infantry Regiment (US), commanded by Colonel Thomas Bramlette, a native of Cumberland County, who would later

resign his commission and eventually make a successful run for governor. Herbert King who, along with his sons, was apparently one of the few men from Crab Orchard who sided with the Union, was commissioned as captain and James H. Bridgewater a second lieutenant. In January 1862, however, Lieutenant Bridgewater followed Captain King’s lead and resigned his commission to return to Lincoln County and serve in the Unionist Home Guard. Like King and Bridgewater, numerous Kentuckians, regardless of previous military commitments, eventually chose to become part of either Unionist Home Guard or guerrilla units. Many counties had prewar Home Guard units that served primarily as slave patrols. The Unionist Home Guard would serve both to police slave populations and to combat guerrillas. As bitterness toward federal policy regarding slavery reached its peak in 1864, some of these men no doubt made the transition from Guard to guerrilla. Bridgewater, however, would remain a staunch Unionist to war’s end and after, as well as a close acquaintance of Thomas Bramlette.27

Tensions in Lincoln County escalated during the war as both sides committed outrages based on old grievances and wartime agendas. The most infamous occurred in October 1862, as Bragg’s Confederate Army retreated through Crab Orchard after his technical victory at the battle of Perryville. On October 20, 1862, Confederate outriders, ostensibly part of Joseph Wheeler’s cavalry screen, took the opportunity to capture Herbert King and his two sons, later hanging them and thirteen other captured Unionists in the vicinity of Cumberland Ford. Their executioners, who obviously knew well the faces of these men, labeled King and the others “bushwhackers” in death, thus justifying their murder. This negative epitaph remains burned into the memories of some Lincoln County families to this day. These executions set neighbor

against neighbor as families of the slain soon made reprisals against Confederate sympathizers, and these two groups would continue feuding throughout the 1860s.  

By late 1862, the Union Army had marginal control over most of Kentucky and chose to run it as a military district, which it would do until October 1865. Thus the Commonwealth chafed under periods of martial law and tight regulations on commerce imposed by federal agents, collectors, and boards of trade. Additionally, communities began to come apart at the seams as partisan and guerrilla raids took their toll. While Bragg’s invasion had not produced the swarm of volunteers for which he had hoped, neither had it solidified support for the Union, even in the perceived Unionist stronghold of Louisville. The risk of siding with the Confederacy may have been too rich for the blood of a majority of Kentuckians, but many of them, particularly in the Bluegrass, resented the growing cost of being occupied by the Union.

In particular, many Unionists became increasingly frustrated with federal policy regarding the status of slavery in Kentucky as the war progressed. When the Confederate tide ebbed in Kentucky in late 1862, contrabands came north from Tennessee, and within its borders


29 Clinton W. Terry, “‘Let Commerce Follow the Flag’: Trade and Loyalty to the Union in the Ohio Valley, Ohio Valley History, 1, 2 (Spring 2001): 10. See Coulter, Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky, 57-80, 215-226, for a detailed discussion of the roots and extent of Kentuckians’ bitterness toward federal wartime trade restrictions.

both federal and state authorities struggled as to what to do about slaves who belonged to known Confederates. The Second Confiscation Act, ostensibly designed to bring clarity to this situation, only served to strengthen anti-federal sentiment among Kentucky’s Unionists because it denied farmers needed labor and creditors an opportunity to recover their money from sale of the property left behind by Confederate sympathizers. Local and state authorities, in a blatant attempt to thwart federal confiscation efforts, made preemptive seizures of property, including slaves, on behalf of Kentucky creditors, quickly selling this property at auction in order to settle local accounts before the federal government could interfere.31

Additionally, President Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, although it did not apply directly to Kentucky, set a precedent for federal interference with slavery, a point not missed by either the Commonwealth’s Unionist slaveholders or its slaves. Either believing that Lincoln, in the form of federal troops stationed throughout the Commonwealth, was trying to free them, or perhaps simply looking to take advantage of a new opportunity to free themselves, growing numbers of slaves flocked to Union lines, particularly to camps throughout the Bluegrass Region. Though some commanders rigorously turned them away, others welcomed any and all, and defiantly vowed not to return them to slavery, regardless of the loyalty of their legal owners.32 Indeed, some federal officers, particularly those from states to the north and northwest of the Ohio, seemed to believe that the liberation of slaves was a major component of their mission in Kentucky, a state at least some of them deemed part and parcel to the South.33

33 Christopher Phillips, “‘The Chrysalis State’: Slavery, Confederate Identity, and the Creation of the Border South,” in Inside the Confederate Nation: Essays in Honor of Emory M. Thomas,
Colonel Smith D. Atkins, commander of the 92nd Illinois Infantry, refused to turn back any slaves who entered his lines, regardless of the loyalty of the master. He confided to a friend, “My superior Commanders order me to give up the niggers…But under the Presidents proclamation…I cannot conscientiously force my boys to become the slavehounds of Kentuckians.” Basing his actions on what he believed to be the intent of the Emancipation Proclamation, Atkins risked court martial “Simply because I will not make myself & my regiment a machine to enforce the slave laws of Kentucky & return slaves to rebel masters.” In a public address, Adkins “reminded his officers and men that they were now in an enemy’s Country,” and though they had not come to Kentucky expressly “for the purpose of ‘hunting Negroes’…loyal men must keep their negroes at home if they wish to keep them as Slaves.”

Though a Cleveland, Ohio, newspaper applauded the position taken by Atkins, his immediate superior, J. C. Cochran of the 14th Kentucky Infantry (US), was outraged, as were the numerous Bluegrass slaveholders who initiated legal action against him in hopes of reclaiming their slaves. In response to these and other complaints, General Granger of the Army of Kentucky, headquartered in Lexington at that time, in turn complained to his superior that Union officers, particularly those from the free states of the Old Northwest, were “seducing negroes from their homes into their camps; nor are they particular as to whom these negroes belong…” with the result that “many of the camps are being crowded with worthless negroes, interfering with the proper exercise of military duty, and, in fact, greatly demoralizing the men.”

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34 S. D. Atkins to Miller, November 2, 1862, enclosed in James Miller to Abraham Lincoln, November 10, 1862, Letters Received, Office of the Secretary of War, Record Group 107 (hereinafter cited as RG 107) (National Archives, Washington, D.C.); Summary of a speech by Col. Atkins, enclosed in J. T. Boyle to H. G. Wright, November 13, 1862; G. Granger to General, November 18, 1862, both in Letters Received, Entry 3514, Department of the Ohio,
The absurdity of the situation faced by Granger is clearly illustrated by the story of Colonel Mundy, commander of the 23rd Kentucky Infantry (US), who unabashedly wrote directly to President Lincoln to complain. He stated that a Michigan regiment had illegally taken within their lines in Lexington twenty-four slaves belonging to him and other loyal Union men from the surrounding area. The Michigan commander refused to release these slaves to the Fayette County civil authorities. Providing insight into what kept many a Unionist slaveholder awake at night, Mundy complained that,

“Our negroes are being taught by the abolition officers from Michigan and other northern states now serving in Kentucky, that on the first day of January next, they are all to be free, and will have a right even to kill their masters who may attempt to restrain them, which has aroused a lively apprehension in the minds of Citizens in Central Kentucky of a servile insurrection at that time unless prevented by such orders as will check the evil."

In response to these practices and Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, some Kentuckians attempted to leave the service altogether. To placate Unionist slaveholders and prevent further dissent and defection, federal commanders were ordered to close their camps to any and all slaves, with no distinction regarding their point of origin.

Such policy, if stridently implemented, would not only deny Kentucky runaways opportunities for freedom, but would also turn runaways from further south over to less than


sympathetic local authorities. However, evidence is strong that soldiers continued to defy this policy, keeping their employees while occasionally surrendering the hapless token runaway to mask their defiance. In Louisville, regiments encountered large numbers of vagrant slaves who had been impressed to work on the defenses of the city during Bragg’s invasion, and seized the opportunity to liberate some of them. Knowing that city authorities would return these vagrants to owners who claimed them, and then sell those left unclaimed to new owners, soldiers sought to intervene. Both slave owners and slave hunters followed regiments from Michigan, Illinois, and elsewhere, trying to regain their property even as the troops sought to shield known runaways both from civilians and local authorities. Finally, the situation in this vital port city deteriorated to the point that General H. G. Wright, commander of the Army of the Ohio, ordered no slaves to be allowed to board troop transports in Louisville, an order that some soldiers either actively or passively continued to disobey.³⁷

To the further ire of Bluegrass slaveholders, in August 1863, the commander of the Military District of Kentucky called for six thousand slave laborers to be requisitioned, or “impressed”, from the counties of Bourbon, Boyle, Clarke, Fayette, Garrard, Harrison, Jessamine, Lincoln, Marion, Mercer, Nelson, Scott, Washington, and Woodford, within which the federal army was building or improving railroads with the long-term goal of establishing a continuous rail line from the shore of northern Kentucky to Knoxville. These slaves, all male from age sixteen to age forty-five, were to make their way to Camp Nelson, and from there they would be organized into work gangs for this massive road project, with pay minus expenses going back to their owners. Hiring out slaves was not necessarily a new experience for many

Kentuckians, but most hiring practiced by rural Bluegrass slaveholders tended to involve female domestic help, not prime field hands. As the project got underway, slaveholders protested, both actively and passively. Quotas invariably came up far short of military expectations as masters refused to contribute their male slaves. Additionally, the nature of the construction project changed, and most impressed slaves were diverted either to work on wagon roads in the same area or to serve as teamsters. In the resulting confusion, particularly regarding the status of teamsters who had been removed all the way to Tennessee, some slaves were even mistaken as free black wage laborers and thus personally received their pay.\(^{38}\)

Slaveholders in Marion County were outraged when they learned that their impressed slaves had been moved to Nashville. They complained directly to recently elected Governor Thomas Bramlette, who forwarded their complaints to federal authorities. These slaves were hired for thirty dollars a month to be paid to their owners, and under no circumstances were they to be removed from Kentucky, and yet they were now in Tennessee. Further, federal authorities were loath to return the slaves when their contract expired, unless the slaves demanded to be returned.\(^{39}\) Not only had these slaveholders lost their slaves for the foreseeable future, but also other complaints reveal that many Bluegrass slaveholders had never been paid at all for the hiring out of their slaves, and stood little chance of receiving compensation. Many slaves died of injury, disease, or exposure in the winter of 1864, while others simply ran away when the

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\(^{39}\) Thomas E. Bramlette to Stephen G. Burbridge, February 26, 1864, with enclosures; Thomas E. Bramlette to Edwin M. Stanton, April 12, 1864, both in Letters Received, RG 107, both reprinted with annotation in Berlin, et al, eds. *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867, Series I, Volume I, The Destruction of Slavery*, 595-596, 598, respectively.
occasion to do so presented itself. As the Union Army began actively recruiting Kentucky slaves for the ranks of the United States Colored Troops, runaways frequently found safe haven in the form of recruiting officers who cared little about a slave’s need for his owner’s permission to enlist.\(^{40}\) Taking advantage of such opportunities, first hundreds then thousands of young enslaved men in Kentucky moved toward freedom, eventually forcing the federal government to accept the basic facts that, first, it needed large numbers of African Americans to win the war, and, second, that slavery in the Commonwealth had rapidly begun to crumble from underneath.

Regardless of any and all attempts to assuage the fears of Unionist slaveholders, by 1863 the Commonwealth was up in arms over possible federal interference with slavery in loyal states. One state representative phrased it thusly: “A restoration of the Union as it was, and the Constitution as it is, is the battle cry of the Union men of Kentucky.” Nathaniel Wolfe of Jefferson County, who had been a leading proponent of Kentucky neutrality in 1861, went on to rail for many minutes against “the abolition leaders in Congress [who] avow that they are not governed by the Constitution.” He further declared, “The Government has fallen into the hands of political cut-throats who seek to assassinate the Constitution in the guise of fanaticism.” But he also noted that he had “equal abhorrence for secession.” He concluded, “Kentucky will accept no such destiny. She will dispute every inch of ground with abolitionism and secession, and she will fall, if fall she must, struggling to uphold the Constitution and the Union.”\(^{41}\)

Reluctant Unionists who now found themselves caught up in a war of which the federal

\(^{40}\) W. W. Woodward to R. Morrow, April 14, 1864, Letters Received, Entry 3514, Department of the Ohio, RG 393; James M. Fidler to W. H. Sidell, June 2, 1864, Letters Received, Entry 3967, Kentucky Acting Assistant Provost Marshal General, RG 110, both reprinted with annotation in Berlin, et al, eds. Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867, Series I, Volume I, The Destruction of Slavery, 598-599; 600, respectively.

\(^{41}\) Speech of Hon. Nat. Wolfe, February 11, 1863, printed by the Louisville Democrat [Filson Historical Society, Louisville (hereinafter cited as FHS)]; Kleber, ed., Kentucky Encyclopedia, 962; Coulter, Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky, 173-175.
government had just made emancipation a major component, Kentucky politicians such as Wolfe and their constituents would continue to put forth every effort to hold on to slavery, and they would become increasingly bitter toward the federal government.

A soldier of the 22nd Michigan Infantry had an insightful exchange that April with a recently captured Confederate raider that summed up the bind in which Kentucky slaveholders found themselves. The 22nd Michigan had marched south from Lexington to Danville, where a large force of mounted Confederates hit them hard. The Michigan men lost most of their baggage train as they fell back toward the Kentucky River, but cavalry and mounted infantry came to their aid, eventually routing the Confederates near Somerset, down in Pulaski County. In the process, over two hundred raiders were captured, along with three hundred head of pilfered cattle. By the time the Michigan regiment regrouped near Lancaster and then marched through Stanford and Crab Orchard on their way to Somerset, the battle was over. Encountering prisoners as he marched south, William Painter apparently stopped for a chat with one. According to the Michigan man, the Confederate told him that his unit had come to the Commonwealth “to Steel horses and Cattle But they Damd Yankees Would not let them take them.” Then the Confederate asked “which was they Werst to Steel Nigers or Cattle”? While Painter was confident that “they Rebels are all drove acros they Cumberland River,” he likely could have located many conditionally loyal Kentuckians pondering similar questions.42

Many enslaved Kentuckians seemed to believe that any affiliation with Union troops equated to freedom. As an Ohio soldier stationed in Lincoln County noted in September 1863, “Well father this is a grate country for farming, a nice Cuntry for farmers, but you can’t see any

42 William Painter to Wife, April 3, 1863, Union Soldiers’ Letters, 1862-1865, FHS.
thing But negrows and Mules the nigers in the field look like Black Birds, the nigers in this Cuntry think ever man they see with a Blue Coat on is fiting to free them But they are intirly mistaken.43 Events over the next eighteen months suggest that Bluegrass slaves were not entirely mistaken, though some would experience cruelty at the hands of Bluecoats. Given the opportunity and chaos of war, numerous slaves would find paths to freedom, and their constant pressure on both military and civilian authorities would quickly lead to the destruction of slavery in Kentucky, if not the establishment of freedom as many slaves envisioned it.

African Americans in Kentucky thus had seized the initiative in what they deemed a struggle for liberation, taking advantage of ambiguous and unevenly enforced federal policy relating to refugees and contrabands, finding opportunities to work for freedom even as they were pressed into labor for the federal war effort, and simply acting with their feet by running away when an opportunity presented itself. Now, they would volunteer in huge numbers, in many cases regardless of whether or not their owners granted permission, for the ranks of the United States Colored Troops. Still, Bluegrass slaveholders refused to accept the reality of slavery’s impending demise in the Commonwealth. Black residents of the Bluegrass often bore the brunt of Kentucky’s escalating guerrilla war as they came under attack both from organized bands loosely operating on behalf of the Confederacy and from vindictive, supposedly loyal slaveholders. Enslaved and newly freed Kentuckians sometimes paid with their lives for participating in this freedom struggle, and they frequently faced callous disregard for their plight and vulnerability on the part of local, state, and even federal authorities.

43 William P. Hurtley to Mr. and Mrs. Thomas T. Hurtley, September 22, 1863, Union Soldiers’ Letters, FHS.
Chapter Two

“Loyal Masses” and “Fiends of Hell”:
Politics, Partisans, Emancipation, and Guerrilla Warfare

During the Civil War, many residents of the Bluegrass chose sides and fought against one another as part of regular military units, but many more chose a more irregular approach. According to those who lived through it, a full-fledged guerrilla war raged through much of Kentucky in the mid-1860s. This conflict was clearly evidenced in the Bluegrass Region, particularly along avenues of commerce and supply such as rivers, railroads, and wagon roads. On the surface, Kentucky’s guerrilla war appeared to be centered on the activities of well-known Confederate raiders such as John Hunt Morgan. But beneath this veneer, a much more personal war erupted as Kentuckians took up arms not only for the Confederacy but also against a federal government seemingly intent on destroying the institution of slavery, not just in the Confederacy but also in states that had not seceded. The rise of anti-federal guerrilla bands, coupled with the hardship of war, rent in twain the curtain of civility that previously had masked community conflicts in many Bluegrass counties. In this chaotic environment, identity and loyalty proved malleable and deceptive as opportunity for economic gain, unsanctioned mayhem, and retribution became increasingly widespread and, to a degree, socially acceptable.

Open guerrilla warfare, coupled with the growing quandary over the fate of slavery in the Commonwealth, certainly perplexed Kentucky’s newly elected governor. When the Civil War came to Kentucky, Thomas Bramlette did his part by volunteering to fight for the Union not once but twice. He organized a regiment in the first year of the war, but he resigned his colonel’s
commission in 1862 to accept President Lincoln’s appointment as United States district attorney for Kentucky. He soon left that position for a general’s commission, but when he failed to get the assignment he wanted, he apparently decided that he could best serve his state as governor. And so he resigned yet again and accepted the Union Party’s nomination in 1863 for the regular quadrennial gubernatorial election. Himself a Unionist Democrat, he helped build a coalition of both Unionist Democrats and former Whigs into a dominant party that easily defeated the other Democrat against whom he ran. His campaign benefited greatly from federal policy, including a declaration of martial law that in effect eliminated certain of his competitors, along with numerous political dissenters in the Commonwealth. As leader of this wartime party, Bramlette pledged unconditional loyalty to the Union, but he quickly found himself at odds with the Lincoln administration.¹

Governor Bramlette and his allies in the state legislature repeatedly petitioned for cooperation from Washington, both in the form of payment for public and private reparation claims resulting from Morgan’s raids and in the form of support for raising a large state militia to defend against any further such raids. Additionally, Bramlette personally asked for Stephen G. Burbridge, a brash thirty-two year old Scott County slaveholder who had proven himself a capable field officer, to be appointed as commander of the Military District of Kentucky. But by September of 1864, no payment of claims was forthcoming, and he had lived to regret his endorsement of Burbridge.² In a strident letter to President Lincoln, he laid out his principle

complaints, and in so doing alienated himself from both Burbridge and the Lincoln administration for the rest of the war. Above all, he challenged the administration’s role in shifting the Civil War from a fight to restore the Union to a war to end slavery:

We are for the restoration of our Government throughout our entire limits regardless of what may happen to the negro. We reject as spurious, the Unionism of all who make the Status of the negro a sine qua non to peace and unity. We are not willing to imperil the life liberty and happiness of our own race and people for the freedom or slavery of the negro. To permit the question of the freedom or slavery of the negro, to obstruct the restoration of National authority and unity is a blood stained sin. Those whose sons are involved in this strife demand, as they have the right to do, that the negro be ignored in all questions of settlement, and not make his condition—whether it shall be free or slave, an obstacle to the restoration of national unity & peace. Such are the sentiments of the loyal masses of Kentucky. Why therefore are unequal burdens laid upon the people of Kentucky?  

The “unequal burdens” of which Bramlette wrote involved extensive federal intervention in Kentucky in order both to secure its status within the Union and to facilitate the staging and supply of Union armies in the face of partisan and guerrilla warfare. But the most pressing issue before Bramlette in September was the fate of slavery in his state. If the seeds of rebellion had sprouted, they did so with nourishment from fertilizer being spread on Kentucky’s soil in the form of federal policy. Yet the governor’s slash at Lincoln cut both ways as he also admonished Kentucky slaveholders not to place conditions on their Unionism. In truth, many of these slaveholders had remained loyal to the Union primarily because they hoped at best to retain ownership of their slaves and at worst to be compensated for their emancipation. By the autumn

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*Kentucky*, 194-196; Stephen I. Rockenbach, “‘War Upon Our Border’: War and Society in Two Ohio Valley Communities, 1861-1865” (Ph.D. diss., University of Cincinnati, 2005), 178-182.

of 1864, such hopes were waning and many of these slaveholders evidenced great bitterness over this turn of events. Some of them began supporting, or at least cheering on, Kentucky guerrillas in their anti-Union campaign. Others simply took their anger out on their own slaves, particularly the families of men who enlisted in the USCT. As their duly elected governor, Bramlette had to take strong measures in order to maintain his legitimacy in their eyes. He had to resist, and perhaps openly defy, the Lincoln administration’s policies regarding Kentucky.4

Adding to Bramlette’s trials, guerrilla raids reached epidemic proportions in the year following his election. In some ways the spawn of John Hunt Morgan’s “Great Raid” of 1863, localized guerrilla bands became more numerous and more ruthless in the last year of the war.5 This more insurgent “people’s warfare” was “anything but civil in the sense of military convention.” To understand Kentucky’s guerrilla war, one must look at “cause and character, campaigns and stratagems, and even gender and minorities” as well as “personal vendettas, family feuds, neighborhood hooliganism” and more. Indeed, by the summer of 1864, the guerrilla war in central Kentucky had come to resemble not a component of a larger war between states but a blossoming revolution against federal authority. It involved well and poorly defined units, prominent and obscure leaders, and enigmatic individuals compelled simultaneously by the highest and lowest of motivations, all mounted and heavily armed.6 While guerrillas conducted

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4 Ibid; Coulter, Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky, 179.
5 See James A. Ramage, Rebel Raider: The Life of General John Hunt Morgan (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1986), 47-50, in which he argues that Morgan viewed the Civil War as a revolution, thus justifying his use of guerrilla tactics, as well as his encouragement of others to do so. Numerous units who raided with him in 1863 and 1864 either had always been, as in the case of George M. Jessee, or afterward became localized bands of Kentucky guerrillas.
numerous raids with intent to sabotage and frustrate the federal military effort, they increasingly targeted black recruits for cold-blooded murder.

When the federal government began recruiting black troops in 1863, Kentucky received an exemption, a clear sign of the government’s desire to retain the loyalty of Unionist slaveholders. Initially, many slaves in southern and western Kentucky simply ran away to Tennessee to join the ranks of the USCT, while some slaves from central and northern Kentucky made their way across the Ohio to enlist in Ohio and Indiana. Though Kentucky slaveholders and their political allies vigorously protested, recruiting officers in neighboring states appear to have ignored them. Additionally, some white Kentuckians, especially non-slaveholders without the means to buy their way out of the draft, looked favorably on black enlistment as a way to fill the state’s quota. Even as pressure built within the state to allow recruitment of Kentucky slaves, Bramlette and other prominent Kentuckians, including Colonel Frank Wolford, remained vehemently opposed. In March 1864, Congress, not of a mood to continue handling Kentucky slaveholders with kid gloves, simply amended the Enrollment Act to include slaves in the draft, thus clearing the way for full-scale recruitment in the Commonwealth. White Kentuckians, by failing to meet federal enlistment quotas, assured that enlistment of black soldiers would begin in earnest throughout the Commonwealth, including the Bluegrass Region.7

Initially, recruitment focused on western Kentucky, where slaves were enlisted for artillery regiments slated for garrison duty in key river forts in the Mississippi Valley. But in

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April 1864, Burbridge opened the door to slave recruitment throughout the Commonwealth. White Kentuckians had not been forthcoming in sufficient numbers to fill quotas, and so Kentucky’s district commander sought to make up the difference with a carefully controlled enlistment process for black soldiers. He attempted to appease slaveholders by decreeing that only free blacks and those slaves who had permission from their masters would be accepted at recruiting stations. Slaves who showed up without proof of permission would be sent back home, ostensibly to obtain it. All black enlistees would count toward county quotas, as well, a happy note for the numerous white Kentuckians who by 1864 wanted no part of Lincoln’s war. Further, assistant provost marshals would oversee the process to make sure that Kentucky slaveholders had no cause for complaint and were duly compensated for the slaves they allowed to enlist. Finally, all new black recruits would quickly be removed from the state for equipping and training, thus sparing white Kentuckians the terrible sight of armed black men marching through their communities and thus encouraging still more slaves to join their ranks.8

In May, many runaway slaves who attempted to enlist were returned to their masters because they did not have adequate proof of permission to join the army. As Union officers witnessed firsthand the brutal reception awaiting these would-be enlistees, any sympathy they may have had toward slaveholders seemed to evaporate. For example, a provost marshal stationed in Lebanon, Marion County, reported that a group of some seventeen African Americans were turned away from the recruiting office in that town for not having permission. Given passes to assure their safe passage back to their farms, they nonetheless came under attack

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by a mob of local citizens who “seized them and whipped them most unmercifully with cow-

hides.” Similarly, reports from Nelson and Spencer counties stated that some African Americans
had been severely beaten and a few killed for trying to enlist. Finally, the provost marshal
reported that even ostensibly loyal Kentucky troops, namely the 13th Kentucky Cavalry, had
openly opposed efforts to recruit black soldiers. At one point, this provost marshal actually came
under fire from a would-be assassin, a portent of things to come in the southern Bluegrass. He
concluded that “the treatment of the slaves in Ky, during the summer of 1864, the indignities
offered the executors of the law of the land; the denunciations of the President and the
machination of slave holders for the benefit of treason during the same time, admirably
exemplified the barbarities of slavery.”

Thomas Butler of the Sanitary Commission reported similar actions on the part of white
citizens in the southern Bluegrass. A group of some two hundred fifty black recruits started on
foot from Danville, in Boyle County and home to historic Centre College, to Camp Nelson, the
massive supply depot on a bluff above the Kentucky River in southern Jessamine County, on
May 23, 1864. As they left Danville, the body of men came under attack by rock throwing
“citizens and students of that educational and moral center,” and they also received incoming fire
from revolvers. Upon arrival at Camp Nelson, these recruits, some of whom needed medical
attention, received a cold shoulder from the camp commander, who had not yet been instructed
to take them in. Instead, the Sanitary Commission cared for them, dressed their wounds and
bruises. By early June, the Commission had some fifteen hundred such recruits under its care at

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9 Captain James M. Fidler, historical report, enclosed in James M. Fidler to W. H. Sidell, June
15, 1865, Kentucky 4th District, Historical Reports, Entry 50, Provost Marshal General Central
Office, RG 110 [roll 68], reprinted with annotation in Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, Leslie
the camp, though they had yet to be enlisted. Non-commissioned officers took it upon
themselves to begin organizing and drilling what amounted to a full regiment of volunteers.\textsuperscript{10}

For his part, Burbridge quickly amended his policy and by June 1864 virtually any young
male slave who reached a recruiting station received a warm welcome. While many Kentuckians
still remember Burbridge as a dictatorial, cold-blooded brute, in reality he was an unconditional
Unionist who did everything in his power to prosecute the war to a successful conclusion, as did
a number of other loyal Kentuckians. Although he attempted to protect slavery, he became
enraged at what he considered disloyal behavior on the part of numerous slaveholders.
Additionally, he recognized the vast untapped military resource embodied in Kentucky’s slave
population, a resource that would allow him to protect his native state from the draft and thereby
preserve at least a semblance of peace in his district. By late summer, approximately 14,000
African Americans had enlisted under Burbridge’s more lenient policy. By war’s end, that
number would swell to nearly 24,000, or more than half of the able-bodied black men of military
age in the Commonwealth.\textsuperscript{11}

This impressive number of black enlistees, coupled with the tens of thousands of young
white men who had already gone off to war, left Kentucky with a serious labor shortage. In
particular, the absence from farm and field of so many able-bodied laborers crippled the
predominantly agricultural economies of many counties, including those of the Bluegrass

\textsuperscript{10} “Reports of Mr. Butler,” John S. Newberry, \textit{The U. S. Sanitary Commission in the Valley of
the Mississippi During the War of the Rebellion, 1861-1866}, (Cleveland: Fairbanks, Benedict &
Co., 1871), 519-521, excerpt reprinted with annotation in Richard D. Sears, \textit{Camp Nelson,
\textsuperscript{11} Berlin, et al, eds., \textit{Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867, Series II,
The Black Military Experience}, 193, 197; Ira Berlin, Steven F. Miller, Joseph P. Reidy, Leslie S.
II, The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Upper South} (New York: Cambridge University
Press, 1993), 629-636; Marion B. Lucas, \textit{A History of Blacks in Kentucky, Volume I: From
Slavery to Segregation, 1760-1891} (Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society, 1992), 152-160.
Region. Additionally, complex but informal local systems of production and trade collapsed under the pressures of wartime trade policy. Federal policy often proved to be both heavy-handed and susceptible to corruption, as was the case during the “Great Hog Swindle” of 1864, in which federal authorities attempted to establish a monopoly on pork packing in the Commonwealth. The plan called for a ban prohibiting Kentuckians from selling hogs to markets outside the state, particularly to Cincinnati or New Albany, with the goal of driving down the price the federals had to pay for Kentucky hogs. Kentucky hog growers were outraged, as was Governor Bramlette, and, with strong support from their economic partners on the other side of the river, they raised a sufficient hue and cry that the federal plan was swiftly abandoned.12

Equally disturbing was the January 1864 suspension of all distilling in the Commonwealth. Far from merely threatening the state’s supply of whiskey, this suspension created a meat shortage, as distillers typically increased their profits by purchasing hogs and beef cattle, fattening them on the mash left over after distillation, then reselling them to both military buyers and local markets. Though the ban on distilling was happily short in duration, it served as yet another reason for resenting federal meddling in state and local affairs. As the most readily identifiable representative of the federal government in Kentucky, as well as for his roles in federal confiscation, slave recruitment, and the undermining of the state’s economy, not to mention his tactics in the ongoing guerrilla war and his rough treatment of leading critics of the Lincoln administration, Stephen G. Burbridge became a most hated man in the Commonwealth.13

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13 Rockenbach, “‘War Upon Our Border’,” 194-195; Coulter, Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky, 392-394.
Governor Bramlette and other state officials vehemently opposed federal recruitment policy, and a number of slaveholders wrote directly to President Lincoln in forlorn hope of persuading the Kentucky-born executive to intercede on their behalf. Elizabeth A. Minor’s poignant letter, including a passionate appeal to Lincoln as “a philanthropist and a Christian,” serves as an excellent example. A resident of Jefferson County, Minor was born into a slaveholding family, though she claimed to have favored both gradual emancipation and colonization from her “earliest youth.” Toward that end, she apparently oversaw the education of four family servant boys in preparation for sending them to Liberia. Instead, her servants, seeing a host of other young black men rush to recruiting offices, ran away to join the USCT. Minor pulled no punches in describing the desperate plight of her family in the absence of their servants: a mother who was “helpless as an infant,” a husband “in the decline of life,” her own health “very delicate” and “no children to fall back upon.” Minor’s two letters to Lincoln never reached the President. Instead the Bureau of Colored Troops received them and offered her this terse reply: “The reasons given in your request are considered insufficient, and to discharge them, would establish a precedent injurious to the interests of the service and not warranted by the circumstances of the case.”

As recruiting picked up pace in Kentucky, numerous problems surfaced, one of which involved ongoing confusion relating to slaves fleeing north from Confederate masters. These contrabands needed no permission either to hire on as camp labors or to enlist in the USCT. As noted in the first chapter, both state and federal authorities had difficulty discerning between Confederate contrabands and Kentucky slaves. Further, some enterprising individuals found

opportunities to exploit this confusion. No doubt some Kentucky runaways were clever enough to pose as contrabands. On the other hand, authorities in Louisville had a reputation for seizing “vagrant” African Americans and selling them at auction, caring little as to their legal status. Finally, by the summer of 1864 reports surfaced across the river from Louisville of recruiters from eastern states enticing black men to go back with them and serve as substitutes. The Adjutant General of Indiana complained to Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas that these agents, working for substitute brokers in Pennsylvania, New York, and elsewhere, were preying on contrabands and runaways from Tennessee and Kentucky. He accused these agents not only of carrying off contrabands to other states, but even enticing enlisted men to “doff their clothes [uniforms] and clothe themselves in citizens’ dress and go East and enter as substitutes.”

Just as Kentucky slaves’ initiative in seeking to enlist had helped force the hand of Burbridge, so too did their eagerness lead to a decisive change in policy regarding where these thousands of new recruits would be organized and trained. With the backing of Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, Adjutant General Thomas ordered the establishment of eight camps in Kentucky for housing these volunteers as they made the transition from slave to soldier. His reasoning seems to have been two-fold: from a sheer logistical standpoint, the army simply could not quickly remove so many thousands of volunteers from the state. Additionally, Thomas, like many federal officials, was growing increasingly unsympathetic toward belligerent Kentucky slaveholders. Of these training camps, none was more important than Camp Nelson, where slaves showed up in such large numbers that some had to wait weeks just to enlist. Named after William “Bull” Nelson and first established as a recruiting center for loyal white Kentuckians, Camp Nelson had also served as a major staging area for impressed black work gangs. As a

15 Laz. Noble to L. Thomas, July 29, 1864, OR, Series III, Volume IV, 559-560.
result, it already had become a focal point for the wrath of Bluegrass slaveholders. Now, it would become a center, both real and symbolic, for the freedom struggle in which Kentucky’s slaves engaged, and thus the center of national controversy and local heartbreak concerning the growing number of black refugees fleeing their Bluegrass masters.16

Thomas Butler worked tirelessly through the auspices of the Sanitary Commission and the Soldiers’ Home to ease the plight of the enslaved men who came to Nelson to enlist. He observed slaveholders visiting the camp on a daily basis, attempting to cajole or coerce their slaves into returning to their farms. He also reported that on June 26, 1864, “two citizens murdered a colored recruit near camp, and many other outrages were perpetrated in the immediate vicinity,” including cutting off of ears and flaying alive. Slaveholders even resorted to bringing into camp the loved ones of slaves in hopes of persuading them to quit the army. If that failed, they were not above attempting to kidnap their slaves and remove them from the camp. The assistant provost marshal of Boyle County served as a particular nemesis for Butler, due to his sympathies toward slaveholders from that county. He tried numerous times to order slaves to return to their masters, only to have Butler intervene. The obviously divided loyalties of this marshal, as well as the violent resistance to recruiting efforts, highlight the difficulties of implementing any federal policy in Kentucky at odds with both powerful local elites and community commitment to the maintenance of white supremacy.17

Even in the face of such opposition, black recruits streamed to federal camps, overwhelming the military bureaucracy. By July 1, 1864, Adjutant General Thomas reported

that he had “at Camp Nelson 3000 negroes, and they will be organized as soon as I can get
officers.” Families of recruits often ran away to army camps to be near their men and to escape
reprisals from their masters, but in these camps they faced an uncertain future. By the summer
of 1864, refugee women and children suffered greatly from hunger and disease. On June 20,
1864, Burbridge ordered the establishment of a contraband camp at Nelson, stating, “women and
children cannot be left to starve.” But Thomas, responding to the pleas of a camp commander
who was constantly harassed by slaveholders looking for their runaways, ordered the return of as
many women and children as possible to their loyal Kentucky owners, arguing that “in this State,
where slavery exists, I conceive I have only to do with those who can be put in the army.” These
two somewhat conflicting policies resulted from the ongoing ambiguity of federal policy for
dealing with refugees. The plight of women and children at Nelson was further complicated
when Brigadier General Speed S. Fry took over command of the camp in July of 1864.18.

After inspecting his new post, Fry made the following observation: “If some means are
not soon devised to return them to their homes we shall not only have war in the land but
pestilence and famine in camp.” Throughout that summer, Fry tried to purge his camp of
Kentucky refugees. His subordinate, Lieutenant George A. Hanaford, described one drawback in
trying to disperse runaway slaves when he stated, “there is not one among two hundred (200)
that want to [return home].” He further noted that these persons were “laboring under the
impression that they will be Killed by their masters if they return, and can not be assured to the

18 J. Bates Dickson to T. E. Hall, June 20, 1864, Telegrams Sent, Jan. 1864-Feb. 1865, Entry
2168, District of Kentucky, RG 393; L. Thomas to Edwin M. Stanton, July 3, 1864, OR, Series
III, Vol. 4, 467-468, both reprinted with annotation in Sears, Camp Nelson, Kentucky, 72-73, 89-
90, respectively; Lucas, “Camp Nelson, Kentucky, During the Civil War,” 446.
No doubt rumors had spread like wildfire among the refugees, based on the very real murders of some slaves who had attempted to enlist. As recruiting for black troops hit full stride, the guerrilla war escalated, suggesting a causal relationship between the two. By this stage of the war, many guerrillas in the Bluegrass had little real connection to the Confederacy, other than a common hatred and bitterness toward the federal government. These guerrillas, by all appearances, also possessed an abiding hatred of unconditional, and unapologetic, Unionists, whom they blamed for remaining loyal to the Union even as it waged war on the institution of slavery. Finally, some embittered proslavery Unionists no doubt tacitly, and in some cases actively, supported these guerrillas in their campaign, sharing with them a common ideology.

At this point, according to one historian, “differences between regular forces, partisan rangers, guerrillas, and civil resistance melded,” and thus “broke down finely constructed legal walls.” Indeed, in 1865 two prominent Morgan lieutenants, Jerome Clarke and Henry C. Magruder, would be hanged in Louisville for their actions as guerrilla leaders, including numerous murders of African Americans, both armed and unarmed, committed by their men in 1864 and 1865. Such was the bitterness surrounding this irregular conflict that even legitimate

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20 This interpretation is strongly influenced by the provocative T. J. Stiles, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002); as well as Michael Fellman, *Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri During the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). Stiles argues that many Missouri guerrillas were adamantly proslavery and therefore just as ideologically motivated as partisan rangers or Confederate regulars. Fellman focuses on a specific class of Missouri guerrillas and notes their justification of brutality toward white male enemies as well as persons of color, male and female, while at the same time maintaining an air of civility and politeness, particularly toward white women. The arguments of both Stiles and Fellman seem highly applicable to a great many of Kentucky’s guerrillas, particularly by 1864.
units such as the 10th Kentucky Cavalry (CSA) came to be considered as part of a class of outlaws subject to the severe consequences outlined in “Lieber’s Code” (technically General Orders No. 100), specifically Sections IV and V on partisans and spies. This lengthy document set the policy and tone for the last two years of the war, establishing federal rules for occupying enemy territory and prosecuting the war against raiders and guerrillas. Most raiders and guerrillas, if caught, could be deemed spies and summarily executed along with any non-combatants rendering them aid or comfort. Property could be seized, suspected collaborators arrested, and, on occasion, prisoners executed in reprisal for guerrilla depredations, particularly the murder of Unionists. As commander of the Military District of Kentucky from February 1864 to February 1865, Burbridge was ruthless in his application of this federal policy, though he proved utterly ineffective at properly coordinating his command and making an end to the costly guerrilla war.21

The Kentucky Home Guard at times was more effective at combating guerrillas than federal troops, if equally effective at offending the Commonwealth’s slaveholders and the commanding officer of the Military District of Kentucky. Adjutant General Daniel W. Lindsey commanded this makeshift organization, a State Guard in name only, from July 1864 through the end of the war. Bridgewater, who sometimes corresponded directly with Governor Bramlette

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and on several occasions rode to Frankfort to consult with him, ranked among the most effective guerrilla hunters in the state. His unit, loosely based in Stanford, was active throughout central Kentucky, generally working to protect the invaluable railroad system and to combat the notorious guerrilla band of George M. Jessee. Bridgewater’s unit typically numbered between forty and fifty men, but occasionally he divided it into two smaller groups. His younger brother John served as his second in command. Apart from run-ins with Jessee, this company of Guardsmen would figure prominently in the hunt for William Clarke Quantrill in early 1865.22

Along with depredations by guerrillas, two other issues often led to confrontations, both physical and political, in war-torn Kentucky: requisition, or blatant theft, of horses, mules, weapons, and fodder; and the even more volatile issue of encouraging, or sometimes forcing, slaves to leave their masters and join the Union Army. Bridgewater became embroiled in a controversy involving both these issues while combating raiders and guerrillas. According to numerous affidavits collected and witnessed by Judge Jonathan Davis of Spencer County, in the second half of 1864 Bridgewater and his men roamed the area, seizing horses, fodder, bridles, saddles, weapons, and occasionally clothes from the farmers in the area. In the words of one Squier Heady, “I have never known Captain Bridgewater to capture any Rebel or his horse but I have known him to capture noncombatants and particularly their horses.” Another witness, Thomas G. Green, noted that “Capt. Bridgewater is regarded in our neighborhood as a dangerous

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22 Thomas Bramlette to Edwin M. Stanton, July 5, 1864, OR, Series III, Vol. IV, 470. For examples of Bridgewater’s effectiveness against guerrillas, see OR, Series I, Vol. XLIX, Pt. 1, 684, 694, 698. See Coulter, Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky, 227-228, in which he describes organization of the Home Guard “a dangerous and unwise move” from the start.
man and there is generally a stampede among horses to keep them out of his reach. He is regarded as being particularly hard on bridles and harness generally.”\textsuperscript{23}

Spencer, like Lincoln, had intense internal conflicts during the war and served as a haven to guerrillas as well as a recruiting ground for the Home Guard. Because numerous farms specialized in breeding horses, Spencer and other Bluegrass counties became favorite raiding grounds for any number of mounted parties as they sought to keep good mounts under them. Not only did Bridgewater’s men seize horses and tack, despite Mr. Heady’s claims they did on occasion arrest suspected Confederate collaborators. John Conway, for example, was captured, horse and all, and taken to the jail in Lawrenceburg, in neighboring Anderson County. Additionally, the several accusations against Bridgewater concerning the liberation of slaves reveal a deeper reason for local animosity toward him. The Widow Sarah A. Wells testified that “I have good reason to believe they persuaded my negroes to go off with them also a negro man of my neighbor D. B. Wigginton, who has a wife at my house during the night, the men were annoying me and my family while passing to and from the negro cabins to such an extent I could not sleep.” Wigginton testified that Bridgewater, in fact, had taken two slaves from him.\textsuperscript{24}

Without doubt, many Unionists in Kentucky actively recruited among slaves, both legally and illegally encouraging, or even coercing, them to join the Union Army, where they would be mustered into regiments of the United States Colored Troops. It is unclear whether or not this was Bridgewater’s aim in persuading the slaves to leave with him. Perhaps he sought merely to deprive suspected enemy collaborators of valuable property, but he may have been under

\textsuperscript{23} Jonathan Davis to D. W. Lindsey, December 1, 1864, (quotes from enclosed affidavits), Folder 1864-1865 Hall’s Gap BN, Evidence against Maj. Bridgewater, Quartermaster and Adjutant General’s Papers [Kentucky Military History Museum, Frankfort (hereinafter cited Q&AG Papers, KMHM)].

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
pressure to forcibly recruit as many slaves as possible to spare Kentucky from the draft and the resulting internal strife both state and federal officials believed would accompany it. Certainly he had no love either for Confederate sympathizers or for the growing numbers of anti-Union guerrillas and common outlaws. In a letter to Lindsey, he called guerrillas “fiends of Hell” for the way in which they terrorized and dislocated poor white families in Kentucky.25

For his part, Bridgewater explained his actions in terms of duty and service, even as he constantly petitioned Lindsey and Bramlette for either money or horses. He had authorization from Bramlette to acquire mounts as needed, and he always seemed to need fresh horses. Thanks to Davis, who mailed them to the Adjutant General, some copies of receipts written out by Bridgewater in exchange for horses still survive. The existence of such receipts indicates that Bridgewater acted in accordance with established procedure in these instances. There is, however, some question as to Bridgewater’s motivation concerning the property he confiscated. His detractors accused him of selling for profit some of the horses and weapons he had seized, and there is mention in several letters of a watch he may have “confiscated” and sold. The records are inconclusive as to whether or not Bridgewater committed any crimes, but he surely understood that every horse he captured, every bridle, every weapon, was one that he denied his adversaries. Whether or not he held anti-slavery sentiments, surely he knew that he dealt suspected Confederate collaborators a severe blow by relieving them of their slaves. His personal animosity toward these sympathizers led him at least to bend, and probably break, Kentucky laws he deemed to favor such persons.26

25 James H. Bridgewater to D. W. Lindsey, December 19, 1864, Hall’s Gap BN, Evidence against Maj. Bridgewater Q&AG Papers, KMHM.
26 Hall’s Gap BN, Evidence against Maj. Bridgewater, for receipts send to Lindsey by Davis; James H. Bridgewater to Thomas E. Bramlette, June 25, 1864, Hall’s Gap BN, Progress Reports, for a direct petition to the governor for either horses or money to buy horses in which
That Bridgewater created a number of enemies through such activities almost goes without saying. He seemed to believe that any hardship he caused a suspected southern sympathizer, and perhaps any profit he or his men realized, was justified. After all, by his reasoning these persons were traitors who had turned against all he held dear: flag and country. As such, they had, at least by his interpretation, forfeited their legal rights, but such a stance also made him a marked man, particularly in his war-torn home county. In August 1864 he wrote that he feared for his safety: “I will not be able to remain at home alone…the rebel sympathisers are getting so bold that it will not be safe for me.” Making clear his disdain for these men, he added that “if they who have gone away from Kentucky to pull down our government and kill me and my friends and spit upon the old flag of my fathers are allowed to return and remain at home armed to shoot Union men down I shall either quit the Service or go for them.”

For Bridgewater, quitting appears not to have been an option with which he could live.

Unionist civilians in Kentucky declared that they needed the services of men like Bridgewater. As one citizen noted, guerrillas were “robing stores taking arms and ammunition, taking horses and money from Loyal and peacable citizens and have hung some worthy citizens till they were almost dead.” To combat these guerrillas, Bridgewater and others were forced to become guerrillas themselves. In other words, they had to be mounted, highly mobile, able to live off the available resources, and capable of meeting violence with violence, day or night. Like the guerrilla bands trying to evade federal cavalry, small groups of Home Guardsmen also had to face the possibility that in any given encounter they might be heavily outnumbered.

Bridgewater reminds Bramlette that all his men are poor, in contrast to the likes of John Hunt Morgan, whose men they are fighting, both in Q&AG Papers, KMHM. See also Hall’s Gap BN, Correspondence, Q&AG Papers, KMHM. Several of Bridgewater’s men seemed to be testifying that he in fact did sell horses, guns, etc., but none made mention of what he did with the money.

27 James H. Bridgewater to D. W. Lindsey, August 15, 1864, Hall’s Gap BN, Progress Reports, Q&AG Papers, KMHM.
Unionist from Bloomfield, near Bardstown in Nelson County, writing to Bramlette for protection for her neighborhood, asked for Bridgewater by name, noting, “His name is a terror through this community.”28 This loyal Kentuckian knew of what she wrote, for Morgan’s raiders, including a large unit commanded by Jessee, had conducted operations in her area in June, not only seizing horses and tack from Unionists but also staging an attack on a supply train running along the Lexington and Frankfort Railroad, all while successfully eluding several federal cavalry units and twenty-five Home Guardsmen from the Louisville Dragoons. Jessee’s unit, numbering between one hundred fifty and three hundred men at any given time, constituted a serious threat to Unionists throughout the summer and fall of 1864.29

Despite their shortcomings, federal authorities sometimes took fairly radical steps in their efforts to combat guerrillas, including formation of mounted units of Colored Troops. At Camp Nelson, the 5th United States Colored Cavalry Regiment was organized for the express purpose of helping bring these guerrilla bands to ground, and its companies would now become more active in recruiting, as well. These units, like James H. Bridgewater’s Home Guard unit, would have to rely on requisitioning for their horses. Military requisitioning was an absolute necessity, but some federal authorities and many practitioners, including Bridgewater, perceived it as a

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28 Thomas Truitt to Governor Bramlette, June 13, 1864 (first quote); Mrs. Glasscocke to Governor Bramlette, January 2, 1865 (second quote), both in Folder 1864-1865, Guerrilla Letters, Q&AG Papers, KMHM.
29 Julius Fosses to Stephen G. Burbridge, June 30, 1864, OR, Series I, Vol. XXXIX, Pt. 1, 29-31. Additional documents in the OR pertaining to George M. Jessee reveal that he was very active in Kentucky from late spring 1864 through early 1865, primarily in the counties of Washington, Nelson, Spencer, Shelby, and Henry, with some activity in Harrison and Bourbon, as well. See Ramage, Rebel Raider, 208-225, for details of this Morgan raid. Ramage additionally provides a scathing critique of Burbridge’s “violations of human rights” (212) in the form of retaliatory execution of prisoners, some of whom arguably deserved protection as legitimate Confederate prisoners of war. However, Ramage acknowledges the dehumanization caused by prolonged exposure to war and the extent to which Morgan’s units became a “dumping ground” for “loafers, bummers, and thieves--riffraff more eager for plunder than for legitimate warfare” as the war progressed (208).
means by which to punish suspected Confederate sympathizers. Policy called for receipts to be written, so that Kentuckians who remained loyal to the Union could be reimbursed for their horses at war’s end. Despite General Burbridge’s efforts to police the practice, requisitioning became a bitterly contested issue in the Bluegrass, as the ongoing conflict between Bridgewater and Judge Davis exemplifies.30

Many Kentuckians cherished their horses, and it mattered little even to the most loyal owners that they stood to receive what the military deemed fair compensation for their pets at war’s end. Besides, “loyalty” among Kentuckians was more a matter of opinion and perception than a discernable fact, as is illustrated by the siblings of the Bullitt family. One of Kentucky’s oldest families, the Bullitts had owned Oxmoor, a sprawling farm in Jefferson County, since 1787, and they owned another farm down in Henderson County, as well as property in Louisville. Thomas W. Bullitt, like numerous scions of prominent Kentucky families, had chosen to fight for the Confederacy. He served as a captain under John Hunt Morgan, but he had been captured and imprisoned, first in Columbus, Ohio, then in 1864 in the officers’ prison at Fort Delaware, on the eastern seaboard. His brother Joshua, chief justice of the Kentucky court of appeals and a Unionist Democrat, remained in Louisville, but in 1864 he ran afoul of federal authorities for his alleged connection to a group called the “Sons of Liberty” that supposedly was plotting against the Union. His greatest crime may have been his strong stance as a Peace Democrat, but nonetheless Burbridge had him arrested and banished to the Confederacy. He managed to return to Louisville in late 1864, only to be forced by an irate Burbridge to flee to Canada for the duration of the war. Their sister Sue, a self-proclaimed “good Union” person,

described her dilemma in trying to protect her beloved horses: “You would laugh to see me hiding them one week from the Federals, & the next from the guerillas.” She urged Thomas “to proclaim to all rebeldom that they must be saved. I would give up every possession I have sooner than my bays.” She also wrote of a boy in her household who had commented that he was glad he was a boy and not a horse, only to realize in horror that someday he might be drafted. Dixon reportedly had no other complaints with federal authorities, even when two hundred “negro troops” were quartered in her community.31

In spite of pervasive guerrilla raiding, and no doubt in a few cases in order to insure its continuation, many Bluegrass residents protested mightily against the federal levies of horses and mules. Further, they were outraged by retributive executions of prisoners, a tactic employed by General Burbridge and supported by United States Provost Marshal Joseph Holt, also a native Kentuckian. For example, on July 27, 1864, Captain J. E. Merritt was ordered by the Provost Marshal’s Office to procure two coffins, proceed with two prisoners, G. Wooten and William Woods, to the vicinity of Georgetown, and execute them by firing squad in retaliation for the murder of a man named Robinson in that Scott County community. Holt, in a letter to Secretary of War Stanton, argued that such executions “cannot fail to produce the happiest effect in mitigating these atrocities.” Additionally, when Burbridge wrote the proposal for organization of the 5th and 6th Colored Cavalry with mounts secured from known Confederate sympathizers, Holt happily endorsed it. According to the Provost Marshal, “These regiments, composed of men almost raised, as it were, on horseback, of uncompromising loyalty, and having an intimate

31 Sue B. Dixon to Thomas W. Bullitt, May 9, July 6, November 9, 1864, and January 22, 1865, Bullitt Family Papers [Filson Historical Society, Louisville (hereinafter cited as FHS)]; Coulter, Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky, 185, 390-392. See also “Report of the Judge Advocate General on the ‘Order of American Knights’ or ‘Sons of Liberty.’ A Western Conspiracy in Aid of the Southern Rebellion,” Bullitt Family Papers, FHS.
knowledge of the topography of the country, would prove a powerful instrumentality in ridding
the State of those guerrilla bands of robbers and murderers which now infest and oppress almost
every part of it.” Unfortunately, the raising of such regiments only exacerbated the problem.32

From his office in Paris, the county seat of Bourbon, the Unionist editor of the Western
Citizen frequently reported stories of outrages committed by guerrillas. For example, a “Cut
throat Gang” allegedly accosted and robbed several residents in the neighborhood of Pond Creek,
about ten miles outside of Paris, on August 20. The marauders got away with several horses and
hundreds of dollars, and they employed terror tactics in hopes of gaining more loot. A man
named Horn, who was “an old respected citizen...of staunch loyalty,” refused to tell them the
whereabouts of further valuables, so “they procured a rope, formed a noose, placed it around his
neck, and hung him up to the limb of a tree no less than three different times.” A man named
Arnold, “another respected citizen,” received the same rough treatment. Guerrillas frequently
used mock lynching both to extract information from their victims and as a clear warning to
others in a given community not to resist them. In this case, the marauders may have been mere
outlaws, but other reports in the Western Citizen document the actions of known Confederate
raiders. In particular, the editor of this newspaper was obsessed with reporting the actions of
Jessee’s men, who had become a terror to Bluegrass Unionists and federal troops alike. A state
historical marker in New Castle, county seat of Henry, marks the site of two skirmishes

32 George Hamilton to J. E. Merritt, July 27, 1864; Joseph Holt to Edwin M. Stanton, July 28,
(quote), and Joseph Holt to Edwin M. Stanton, July 31, 1864, all in OR, Series I, Vol. XXXIX,
Pt. 2, 206-207, 208, 212-215; Coulter, Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky, 230-234;
Lowell H. Harrison, The Civil War in Kentucky (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky,
1975), 76-78.
involving Jessee, including one with Robert Morris’s home guard unit on September 21, 1862, and a clash with Bridgewater’s unit on December 13, 1864.\textsuperscript{33}

As autumn came to the Bluegrass, frustrated slaveholders continued to petition for whatever redress they could get regarding male runaways. In October, a citizens’ group from Madison County complained that anywhere from fifty to one hundred fifty young male slaves had fled without permission to Camp Nelson seeking employment. Realizing the dim prospects of seeing these slaves returned, the group instead asked that the slaves be enlisted and proper credit be given their county for this number of recruits. This credit would mean that fewer white men would have to enlist to fill their draft quota, and loyal slaveholders still hoped to receive promised federal reimbursement of up to eight hundred dollars for their slaves who enlisted. Garrard County and Lincoln County slaveholders filed similar grievances.\textsuperscript{34} Some white residents of the Bluegrass apparently took even more desperate measures to fill draft quotas. On October 7, The Paris \textit{Western Citizen} reported that “the Provost Marshal of Louisville and all his assistants” had been arrested allegedly for kidnapping runaways and selling them as substitutes.\textsuperscript{35}

General Burbridge failed to maintain some semblance of control over both the hiring and enlisting of Kentucky slaves. At the same time, he continued to prove unsuccessful in combating the roving bands of guerrillas that plagued the Commonwealth. On October 14, the \textit{Western Citizen} reported an attack on the vital Kentucky Central Railroad in which guerrillas led by Pete Everett tore up track and then stopped, robbed, and destroyed the morning train bound south from Covington to Lexington. H. H. Haviland of Harrison County corroborated the paper’s

\textsuperscript{33} Paris \textit{Western Citizen}, August 26 (quote), September 2, 9, 16, 1864; Kentucky Historical Marker Database, <http://kentucky.gov/kyhs/hmdb/> (July 20, 2005).
\textsuperscript{35} Paris \textit{Western Citizen}, October 7, 1864.
account of Everett’s attack in a letter to his sweetheart, and he also noted, “the Guerrillas are keeping us in a perfect boil of excitement.” Haviland, his brother, and numerous other citizens of Havilandsville were robbed “very politely,” as was the local general store. Additionally, he reported that virtually every male slave in the community had already enlisted in the USCT. Harrison County, with well over three thousand slaves in 1860, listed over six hundred enslaved men between the ages of fifteen and forty. Perhaps Pete Everett was exacting some revenge on this community for letting so many of those men go off to join the USCT. Bands of “guerrilla desperadoes” often hit fast in Bluegrass counties then retreated to the outlying knobs and hills to hide from their pursuers. For example, one group stopped off at Leesburg, Harrison County, and “laid in a supply of boots, shoes, and other articles as were necessary for a short journey, without paying the cash,” then headed east toward the protection of the Pottsville Escarpment.36

More sinister were the growing numbers of murders committed by guerrillas and the district commander’s response to them. On October 26, Burbridge ordered, “Hereafter no guerrillas will be received as prisoners.” This was in effect license to kill any and all guerrillas who dared surface in his district. Those already captive also faced an uncertain future. On October 28, he ordered eight guerrilla prisoners to be executed, four in Henry County and four in Franklin County, in retaliation for the murders of a known Unionist and two “unarmed negroes”, respectively, in those counties. On November 2, he ordered four guerrilla prisoners “to be shot nine miles from Bardstown, Ky., in retaliation for the murder of “two negroes,” and four to be shot at Midway, Woodford County, in retaliation for the murder of a Unionist there. By late

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36 Paris Western Citizen, October 14, 21, 28, 1864; H. H. Haviland to Sue T. Scrogin, October 20, 1864, Scrogin/Haviland Collection [Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort (hereinafter cited as KHS)].
1864, such tactics had generated an even more pervasive anti-Union backlash in the Bluegrass, the brunt of which would be felt by the victims of guerrillas and vindictive slaveholders alike.37

By the autumn of 1864, the deadly guerrilla war appeared to be discouraging Kentucky slaves from enlisting. Meanwhile, another major conflict emerged at Camp Nelson, this time between District of Kentucky policy designed to protect the rights of loyal slaveholders and the demands of General William T. Sherman’s Atlanta campaign. While the camp commander had authorized limited hiring of cooks and washerwomen both from the ranks of contraband and from local slaveholders, this policy had degenerated under pressure both from runaway Kentucky slaves, who were not contraband but came to camp looking for work and from the hiring practices of the local quartermaster. Additionally, Captain D. W. H. Day, a quartermaster against whom numerous “just complaints” were lodged, hired young male runaways as teamsters and drovers and then sent them south with supplies and cattle for Sherman’s army. For his part, Day complained that overzealous recruiters constantly seized his employees and forced them to enlist. While the formidable Sherman, who had opposed the enlistment of slaves for military service, sided with Day, W. H. Sidell, the Assistant Provost Marshal General for Kentucky, had both state law and powerful allies, including Adjutant General Thomas, on his side. As Sherman refitted his army in preparation for his march to the sea, black enlistees at Nelson increasingly found themselves working for the quartermaster instead of going to active duty, while many black wage laborers in the area were rounded up and forced to enlist and thus assure that proper credit went to their Bluegrass masters. This compromise worked well for the competing military

37 General Orders No. 8, October 26, 1864, Headquarters, Military District of Kentucky; J. Bates Dickson to N. C. McLean, October 28 and November 2, 1864, OR Series I, Vol. XXXIX, Pt. 2, 457, 491, 612, respectively.
Still, black enlistees were already contributing to the war effort. On the afternoon of October 2, 1864, a battalion of Colored Cavalry from Camp Nelson found themselves fighting for their lives near Saltville, Virginia, southeast of Prestonburg, Kentucky. Elements of the 5th and 6th Colored Cavalry commanded by Colonel James F. Wade charged up steep slopes and carried a Confederate breastwork. They held this captured line for two hours, exhausting their supply of ammunition and taking twenty-five percent casualties in the process. At dusk they were able to withdraw with some prisoners in tow, and they carried most of their own wounded down with them, as no ambulances were available. These were the first of many companies of Camp Nelson enlistees who would see active duty in Kentucky, Virginia, and elsewhere by war’s end. However, with increased involvement in the defense of Kentucky came high risks for these soldiers. Colonel James S. Brisbin, who observed the engagement, reported that several black soldiers who “fell into the hands of the Enemy during the battle were brutally murdered.” A Union surgeon, William H. Gardner, who had been captured at Saltville, corroborated his report. Before his parole he witnessed the execution of seven black privates and one white officer at a hospital on the campus of Emory and Henry College, and he was sanguine as to the fate of the remaining prisoners: “I would further state that we left about 70 of our wounded prisoners in the

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38 W. H. Sidell to J. Bates Dickson, October 8, Letters Received, Entry 734, Post of Louisville, Kentucky, RG 393; D. W. H. Day to Robert W. Ratliff, August 29, 1864, Letters Received, Entry 1030, 1st Division, District of Kentucky, RG 393, both reprinted with annotation in Berlin, et al., eds., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867, Series I, Volume II, The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Upper South*, 678-680, 674, respectively; Lorenzo Thomas to Edwin M. Stanton, September 19, 20, 1864, both in *OR* Series III, Vol. IV, 733-734.
said hospital, and that I have been informed that these outrages have been perpetrated on them since we left them.39

As these and other black soldiers were fighting and dying for a chance to be free, in the coming months some dependents of Colored Troops also would pay the ultimate price in their own desperate freedom struggle. Federal policies and attitudes toward refugees seemingly had changed little since the first year of the war, and so authorities were ill-prepared to deal with the exponential increase in numbers as these dependents fled to army camps seeking both relief and liberty from slavery. As refugees streamed to Camp Nelson in the summer and fall of 1864 and encountered a belligerent camp commander who refused to accept responsibility for their care, they simply began to build makeshift shanties anywhere they could with whatever they could find. Fry’s official policy was to see all slaves not fit for military service returned to their owners, but he failed to acknowledge the reality that many of these slaves, particularly women, children, and the elderly, had been driven from their homes by vindictive slaveholders and thus had no home to which they could return. Having nowhere else to go and only a handful of dedicated missionaries and relief workers to help them, these refugees braced for winter, not knowing that before it even began in earnest they would be driven from their camp into the nearby towns and countryside, where many of them would die, miserable and alone, from exposure, hunger, and sickness.40

Apart from the outrageous actions of Speed S. Fry, the winter of 1864-65 would witness widespread violence as Kentucky’s guerrillas were bolstered both by units and individuals who

remained behind following Morgan’s summer raid and by the arrival of William Clarke Quantrill and the remnants of his band of Missouri ruffians. If their motivations are to be judged by their actions, Bluegrass guerrillas primarily sought to hamstring the Union war effort through sabotage, as well as procure supplies for themselves and also the Confederate Army when practicable. On occasion some of them joined with regular Confederate units for campaigns, battles, or raids. Mostly, they harassed lines of supply and communication, while tying up hundreds upon hundreds of mounted federal and state troops assigned to hunt them down and destroy them. These men frequently exacted revenge, most often in the form of armed robbery but sometimes torture or murder, against Kentucky Unionists, whom they seemed to blame for keeping the Commonwealth out of the Confederacy. Additionally, they gunned down numerous black recruits when opportunities came their way, regardless of the fact that on most such occasions these recruits either were unarmed or had already surrendered. In turn, many a captured guerrilla died from being shot in the back, allegedly while trying to escape his federal or state captors. As the guerrilla war reached its zenith, quarter was not something most participants expected to receive or, in turn, extend to their opponents.
Enlistment in the ranks of the USCT provided a potential path to freedom not only for enslaved males but also their wives and children, yet this was a path fraught with peril. Families of recruits often ran away to Union Army camps to be near their men and to escape reprisals from their masters, but in these camps they faced an uncertain future. Additionally, wives and children who either did not or could not flee to refugee centers faced the wrath of slaveholders who had lost valuable male laborers and were none too pleased at this turn of events. The plight of such families was compounded by the fact that most USCT recruits from Kentucky were being rapidly deployed to Virginia. Meanwhile, Kentucky’s slaveholders and their political allies consistently defied federal policy regarding the status of wives and children of black soldiers, even when Congress passed legislation formally liberating dependants of black soldiers. While Kentucky jurists debated the limits of federal authority, state and local authorities continued to enforce slave codes, keeping legally free women and children in a de facto state of slavery for many months.

In early December 1864 a black infantryman stationed at Taylor Barracks, Louisville, wrote a poignant lament to President Lincoln, begging for the emancipation of his wife and four children. The woman and children were the property of an Oldham County slaveholder who allegedly “loves the South [and] hangs with it.” News had reached the Union soldier that his loved ones not only remained enslaved but also suffered from want of basic necessities. When
asked to provide clothing, for which slaveholders traditionally accepted responsibility, the master reportedly replied, “Let old Abe Giv them Close.” Despite their obvious need, the infantryman did not ask Lincoln to clothe his wife and children. Rather, he asked for freedom: “If you will free me and hir and heir Children with me I Can take Cair of them.” As a soldier, he drew pay and forwarded what he could on to his family, but pay was forthcoming in less than a timely manner. Also, he had received the promise of freedom, but first he had to fulfill his commitment to the Union Army. In the meantime, his immediate family was left to the tender mercies of their Kentucky master. Caught along with thousands of his peers on the horns of this peculiar dilemma, George Washington, Company B, 123rd Regiment, United States Colored Infantry, appealed to the Great Emancipator himself.¹

Washington’s plea never reached Lincoln, instead being filed with other similar pleas in the records of the Bureau of Colored Troops. As Washington’s letter indicates, the Civil War provided both hardship and unprecedented opportunities to Kentucky’s enslaved persons. Several thousand African Americans, including some free blacks, were forced into military work gangs in 1862 and 1863. At the same time some slaves, either mistaken for or perhaps posing as contrabands from the Confederacy, found employment with the Union Army. Still others simply took opportunities provided by the chaos of war to head north to freedom, with perhaps as many as 7,000 slaves fleeing the Commonwealth by 1864. Finally, enlistment in the USCT proved to be an opportunity by which many young male slaves gained their freedom, but, as Washington’s letter illustrates, it brought with it not only hardship but widespread heartbreak. In particular,

women and children needlessly suffered at the hands of incompetent camp commanders who utterly failed to understand that the enthusiasm with which black men enlisted and served in the USCT was inextricably linked to their concern over the fate of their dependents.²

Even as the Commonwealth’s black soldiers contributed to the war effort, as well as the demise of slavery in the state, Kentucky’s refugee crisis reached its zenith and spread across the Ohio. A customs official in Evansville, Indiana, noted that:

The Great Deep of Slavery in Kentucky is broken up and the fragments are rapidly drifting northward across the Ohio River. The Men are entering the Union Army by hundreds and thousands--their wives and children, following their husbands, without homes or even the necessaries of life are suffering now and unless they shall be cared for by the Government, many of them will no doubt perish during the winter which is fast approaching. The task is too great for private charity.³

John G. Fee of the American Missionary Society, working alongside the Sanitary Commission at Camp Nelson to care for the families of black soldiers, made a similar assessment when he called for a government camp to be established, noting that “for months the officials here have tried the experiment of sending the women out of camp. Like flies they soon come back...tis hard to see the wife of a soldier driven back to a cruel master.” Alongside Fee, the Reverend Abisha Scofield and his family joined in the effort to establish and maintain a refugee camp and school at Camp Nelson in the face of both indifference and overt, violent opposition. This camp would

serve as something of a lightning rod for strikes by bands of white men mounting a campaign of armed resistance and terror in the face of federally mandated emancipation.4

Indeed, the issue of recruitment of slaves had become a political powder keg in Kentucky in 1864; thus in the Commonwealth the national election became a state referendum on federal policy. United States Senator Garrett Davis of Kentucky had begun the year with a flurry of resolutions condemning the Lincoln administration’s war measures, and in turn had faced threat of expulsion from that august body. In the meantime, Lieutenant Governor Richard T. Jacob publicly had called Lincoln a tyrant, and he urged Kentuckians to come to the polls armed, lest federal authorities attempt to keep them from voting against the incumbent president. Further, he had called for armed resistance to recruitment of slaves for the USCT. Alarmed by such rhetoric, General Burbridge, military commander of the district of Kentucky, had ordered the lieutenant governor arrested, along with an outspoken former commander of Union cavalry. Colonel Frank Wolford, with Bramlette’s blessing, had toured the Ohio Valley stirring up resentment toward the USCT. He, too, was not above encouraging his listeners to stage armed resistance against recruiting officers. Burbridge had Wolford arrested several times, including his arrest in conjunction with that of Jacob. In Lexington, Burbridge ordered the arrest of an acquaintance of Lincoln and senior partner of the prestigious Huston & Downey law firm, John B. Huston.5

Receiving strong endorsements from numerous state officials, Democratic candidate George B. McClellan would carry Kentucky by an overwhelming majority in November, a clear

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refutation of the Lincoln administration and its most visible manifestation, Stephen G. Burbridge. In a move that seemed both petty and tyrannical to many Kentuckians, Burbridge ordered Lieutenant Governor Jacob to be sent via the Kanawha Valley to Virginia, “not to return during war under penalty of death.” Jacob, after all, was in many ways simply a Democrat, not a secessionist. As a Democrat, he favored local over state and state over federal authority. When government, particularly that imposed by military rule, became, in his mind, destructive of such ends, then voices of protest must be raised. Like-minded Colonel Wolford, who had organized the 1st Kentucky Cavalry (US) and spent much time during the war pursuing John Hunt Morgan’s raiders, had been dishonorably discharged in March 1864 for his public criticism of Lincoln and now found himself detained in Covington for raising the same objections. In point of fact, both men had gone more than a bit beyond the pale in their rhetorical attacks and calls for armed resistance, but they represented a great many northern Democrats in their resentment and bitterness over how the war had affected their society. For example, Democratic members of Congress openly called for opposition to Lincoln in the summer of 1864, citing, among other things, “corruption of race” as a result of his wartime policy. In the end, Lincoln would intervene on behalf of both of these outspoken dissenters, perhaps hoping to diffuse the wrath their rhetoric and arrests had unleashed in the Commonwealth. If that was his intent, his magnanimity went for naught, at least as far as disgruntled Kentuckians were concerned.6

6 Stephen G. Burbridge to T. H. Bringhurst, November 15, 1864; Burbridge to N. P. Chipman, November 23, 1864, both in The War of Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (70 vols. in 128, Washington, D.C., 1880-1901) (hereinafter cited as OR), Series I, Vol. XLV, Pt. 1, 903, 1010, respectively; Mark E. Neely, The Union Divided: Party Conflict in the Civil War North (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 125-133. Though he had alienated himself from many Unionists in 1864, Jacob would alienate himself from Democrats after the war by endorsing both the 13th and 14th Amendments. Wolford, on the other hand, would become a staunch Democrat, a successful lawyer, and a two-
Aging Lexington judge and unconditional Unionist William C. Goodloe of Lexington wrote to President Lincoln in defense of Burbridge’s actions, though in so doing he definitely represented a minority of Kentuckians:

Great complaints seem to have been made concerning the arrest of Lieutenant-Governor Jacob and ex-Col. Frank Wolford by General Burbridge. I state the sentiment of the leading loyal men of Kentucky in saying that General Burbridge's action was advised, and is fully indorsed by them. These men are too dangerous to the safety of Kentucky to be permitted to remain here making incendiary and treasonable speeches. It is hoped General Burbridge's action may not be interfered with.7

Goodloe’s home county of Fayette, along with neighboring Madison and nearby Garrard counties, actually had majority votes for Lincoln. Kenton and Campbell were the only other Bluegrass counties that favored Lincoln over McClellan in an election with disproportionately low voter turnout for Kentucky, numbers no doubt reflecting both the large number of Kentuckians who had gone to the Confederacy and strict military policing to keep known Confederate sympathizers and even returning Confederates from the polls.8

While military authorities almost certainly attempted to tamper with the presidential election in Kentucky in 1864 as they had with the gubernatorial election in 1863, they were correct in their concern over returning Confederates. In the last year of the war, men who alleged to be Confederate deserters, as well as other bona fide refugees streaming up from the south, were viewed with suspicion. Though it was driven to some degree by fiery rhetoric on the part of the state’s Unionist editors, this bias had some basis in practical experience on the part of

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7 William C. Goodloe to Abraham Lincoln, November 23, 1864, OR, Series I, Vol. XLV, Pt. 1, 1009.
numerous Unionists and military authorities. The editor of the Frankfort Commonwealth cautioned that former Confederates were “as vile traitors now as when they first foreswore their allegiance to the Union.” Oh the other hand, General Burbridge amassed evidence that former Confederates had in fact used intimidation to obtain favorable references from known Union men. Thus he reported to his superiors that President Lincoln’s amnesty policy, whereby former Confederates and southern sympathizers could sign loyalty oaths, was in effect never worth the paper on which the forms were printed, particularly given the shortage of good paper by late in the war. Citing Burbridge’s report, Judge Advocate General Holt concluded that “the rebels have used this proclamation, and the oath under it, only as a means for returning to the State, visiting their friends, making observations upon our military affairs, and then arming, mounting, and equipping themselves either for the Confederate service or for the career of robbers and cut-throats.” Nonetheless, Burbridge received harsh criticism from numerous prominent Kentuckians for his actions during the 1864 election.9

Perhaps finding things a bit hot in the Bluegrass despite unseasonably cold temperatures, after the election the commander of the District of Kentucky took charge of all the spare mounted troops he could muster and headed southwest to the Cumberland Gap. He had been ordered to aid military operations in eastern Tennessee and southwestern Virginia, where cavalry was desperately needed to combat Confederate units commanded by Kentuckians John C. Breckinridge and Basil Duke. Above all, Burbridge’s units would be responsible for defending the Gap against potential Confederate attack. His actions in mustering this force complied with orders from General Stoneman of the Department of the Ohio, and in the past he had led the cavalry under his command on such campaigns, but the timing of this one must be considered

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convenient for Burbridge. For the rest of 1864 he would command his district from the field, leaving Brigadier General Speed S. Fry and others to manage affairs in the Commonwealth.10

Meanwhile, guerrilla raids, like the refugee crisis, spilled across the Ohio and drew the attention and ire of federal and state authorities in Ohio and Indiana. General Joseph Hooker intentionally set up headquarters for the Union Army’s Northern Department in Cincinnati instead of Indianapolis or Columbus, observing that “with the disturbed state of public feeling in Kentucky, and the prowling bands of guerrillas all over the State, I have felt it necessary to establish myself on the Ohio River.” He and A. P. Hovey, his district commander in Indiana, would have their hands full in coming months trying to police the vital Ohio River and insure that men and materiel continued to flow south to the Union armies bisecting the Confederacy.11

As Burbridge withdrew units for his move to the Cumberland Gap, and as Grant, Stanton, and Lincoln searched for his replacement as commander of the Military District of Kentucky, detachments of Colored Troops took on additional responsibilities. They guarded not only their own bases and assets, such as cattle herds, but also bridges, depots, and other vital points along Bluegrass rail lines, where they would soon come under attack from guerrillas.12 Additionally, Home Guard units were called into active federal service to combat the growing number of marauders. James H. Bridgewater reported to General McLean concerning his run-ins with George M. Jesse’s men in Henry, Shelby, Spencer, Nelson, and Washington counties. Jessee

10 George Stoneman to George H. Thomas; Stoneman to J. Ammen; G. M. Bascom to Steven G. Burbridge, November 16, 1864; OR, Series I, Vol. XLV, Pt. 1, 916-917.
11 Rockenbach, “‘War Upon Our Border’,” 167-175; Joseph Hooker to Edwin M. Stanton, November 23, 1864, OR, Series I, Vol. XLV, Pt. 1, 1011. See also O. P. Morton to Joseph Hooker, January 11, 1865; Joseph Hooker to Stephen G. Burbridge, January 12, 1865; and C. H. Potter to A. P. Hovey, January 19, 1865, OR, Series I, Vol. XLV, Pt. 2, 573, 576-577, 617, respectively, for complaints about Kentucky guerrillas raising hob along the Ohio.
and other guerrillas remained very active in the Bluegrass in December, including Pete Everett’s band, which constantly harassed the citizens in and around Mt. Sterling, Montgomery County.\textsuperscript{13}

In the latter part of November, while Burbridge frantically gathered his cavalry and began moving southeast along the Wilderness Road, and while Camp Nelson blacksmiths and farriers worked feverishly to provide acceptable mounts for his expedition, camp commandant Speed S. Fry ordered to be destroyed the shantytown that provided nominal shelter for refugees. The shanties, also reportedly home to vice and vermin, had been a source of controversy since Fry had assumed command of the camp, and he resolved to deal with this problem once and for all. On Tuesday night, November 22, women in camp apparently were warned that they would be expelled the next day. The following morning, November 23, mounted patrols made the rounds, going from tent to tent and ordering women and children out into the cold. Some guards threatened use of force if anyone, including husbands or fathers, resisted. Probably accustomed to this particular drill, the women and children got onboard wagons and were hauled beyond the camp’s lines to the north, within a few miles of Nicholasville, where they may have assumed that their men would come to retrieve them once things had calmed down. Unfortunately, winter had come early to the Bluegrass in 1864, and with it now came a tragedy that would cost many refugees their lives, if it would also force a dramatic change in federal policy regarding dependents of black soldiers.\textsuperscript{14}

After purging his camp of refugees, Nelson ordered the shantytown burned. As his provost guard carried out this task, the refugees, more than four hundred in all, stumbled into

\textsuperscript{13} James H. Bridgewater to N. C. McLean, December 1, 1864; J. S. Butler to D. W. Lindsey, December 9, 1864; D. W. Lindsey to J. S. Butler, December 17, 1864, \textit{OR}, Series I, Vol. XLV, Pt. 2, 15, 128-129, 246, respectively.

\textsuperscript{14} Lorenzo Thomas to Edwin M. Stanton, January 2 and 3, 1865; \textit{OR}, Series I, Vol. XLV, Pt. 2, 494-495, 503, respectively; Marion B. Lucas, \textit{A History of Blacks in Kentucky, Volume 1: From Slavery to Segregation, 1760-1891} (Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society, 1992), 160-165.
Nicholasville or tried to find some shelter from the bitter winds in the roadside woods. During the course of the next few days, over one hundred died of exposure. Almost immediately an investigation began into this incident, driven in large measure by a telegram sent to Kentucky’s Assistant Adjutant General J. Bates Dickson by Captain T. E. Hall, who had been in Lexington that fateful Wednesday and so was unable to intervene in time to stop the expulsion. Hall and other assistant quartermasters at Nelson, with the help and full support of their immediate superior, Quartermaster E. B. W. Restieaux, compiled affidavits concerning the expulsion. The most poignant of the lot was that of Joseph Miller, a Lincoln County enlistee. Miller’s wife had been forced from his tent in the morning, along with their children, and taken by wagon toward Nicholasville, where he located them later that night in “an old meeting house belonging to the colored people.” His son had already died of exposure, and his other dependents, crowded into the building with many other refugees, had neither heat nor food. These refugees, seeking shelter in what must have been their church, remained there for some days after the expulsion, having nowhere else to go. Others made their way to Lexington in their search for shelter and food. Captain Hall frantically tried to intercede on behalf of the starving refugees, even taking the initiative to buy two hundred rations of bread, meat, coffee, and sugar with his own money from the camp commissary to give to them.15

On November 27 General Burbridge had a telegram sent to Hall, instructing him to begin formal relief efforts with the district commander’s blessing. The next day Burbridge formally ordered Fry not only to stop turning these dependents out of camp, but also to provide Hall

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assistance in bringing them back. Indeed, the assistant quartermaster had been placed in charge of establishing a refugee camp, with instructions to “give them quarters and if necessary erect buildings for them and allow all back who have been turned out.” Not content to let this matter be lost amidst the piles of military paperwork just waiting to be bundled and tied up with red tape, Captain Hall penned a long, highly critical letter to the New York Tribune under the pseudonym “Humanitas,” additionally enclosing Miller’s affidavit. Both the Tribune and William Lloyd Garrison’s Liberator printed the letter and affidavit, quickly turning the tragedy at Camp Nelson into a national embarrassment for the War Department. In the months after the tragedy, Congress would give majority approval to the Thirteenth Amendment, which, once ratified, would forever abolish slavery in the United States. And in March legislators would pass a law freeing immediately dependents of soldiers serving in the USCT.\footnote{Ibid.; The Liberator, December 9, 1864, reprinted with annotation in Sears, Camp Nelson, Kentucky, 139-140; Lowell H. Harrison and James C. Klotter, A New History of Kentucky (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 235. See also Sears, Camp Nelson, Kentucky, 134-155, for more affidavits.} In the aftermath of the Camp Nelson expulsion, Lieutenant Colonel L. H. Carpenter of the 5th Colored Cavalry received orders to assume temporary command as commandant of the camp, while Fry, relieved of that post, took on increased responsibility for the guerrilla war. The duty of building the long-needed refugee camp at Nelson would be assigned to Captain Hall.\footnote{Special Orders No. 77, November 30, 1864, Headquarters, Military District of Kentucky, OR, Series I, Vol. XLV, Pt. 1, 1197.}

In December, several teams of inspectors would make the rounds throughout the Commonwealth. Assistant Inspector-General E. H. Ludington completed an inspection of Burbridge’s district and summarized the state of affairs in the Commonwealth in a report to Secretary of War Stanton. He noted that there was “scarcely any security for person or property” due to the ravages of guerrillas who were “destroying the property and taking the lives of all who
have been, or now are, in the U.S. armies. The citizens are so bitterly arrayed against each other as to afford immunity, if not assistance, to these desperadoes, for each party is glad to see men of the other murdered.” He stated his belief that “from this intestine hatred guerrillas have their origin and maintenance.” Further, Ludington observed, “Kentucky had remained in the war to preserve slavery and avoid becoming a theater of war...but the moment that Government attempted to draft men or enlist negroes, the true feeling of these people was evinced.” He came to the conclusion that “a large majority of Kentuckians are today undoubtedly disloyal,” if he remained ambiguous as to whom or what their disloyalty was directed. This kind of ambiguous accusatory volley, randomly fired in the direction of Kentuckians for many months, by early 1865 would begin to find its mark as the Commonwealth as a whole began to become what it had long been accused of being.18

Ludington additionally noted the scattered, disorganized nature of troops in the military district, and he recommended that no Kentuckians be allowed to serve in their native state. He argued that state troops did “little to punish guerrillas--much against personal enemies. They capture few men in arms, but show their zeal in seizing unarmed people. They plunder largely at their own discretion” with the result that everyone involved had “become exasperated against the Government.” While he reserved his most harsh criticism for Governor Bramlette, a man of “slender capacity, great vanity, and greater ambition” who “knows his people are disloyal, and so qualifies his Unionism,” Ludington also concluded that in the case of Burbridge, “the substitution of a man stronger in capacity and character would be an advantage.” Finally, he urged Stanton to consider deploying a garrison of “100 good troops from another State, mounted

and well officered,” in each county suffering from guerrilla depredations, as if the Secretary of War had several thousand mounted troopers to spare at that moment.19

Almost on cue for corroborating this report, on December 9, the editor of the Western Citizen wrote that a band of guerrillas had attacked two freight trains on the Frankfort and Louisville Railroad. Aside from destroying some rolling stock, the guerrillas attacked a recruiting officer and some twenty black recruits, killing fifteen. The editor also noted the murder of a lieutenant colonel of the Home Guard in Washington County, apparently in reprisal for the executions of several fellow guerrillas, as ordered by General Burbridge.20 This county appears to have been all but besieged in late 1864, as J. A. Morrison of the 13th Kentucky Cavalry (US) reported: “The guerrillas are around here in several squads committing atrocious deeds of murder of citizens and soldiers. Thirteen citizens were murdered yesterday in the vicinity of Springfield.” Other reports indicated that these squads had also cut telegraph wires and otherwise disrupted lines of communication in the area. By all appearances, the guerrilla war was reaching a fever pitch as 1864 came to a close.21

Two commissioners of investigation on behalf of black refugees also filed a report in December after making stops in Louisville, Lexington, and Camp Nelson. They concluded the obvious: “There is no organized camp for the reception and care of colored refugees within this State.” Special Commissioners Bostwick and Hood blamed Adjutant General Thomas for encouraging Fry to turn out refugees and destroy their shelter. On the other hand, they “found General Burbridge, commander of the district, a gentleman whose sympathies are largely with

19 Ibid.
20 Paris Western Citizen, December 9, 1864.
21 J. A. Morrison to J. S. Butler, November 28, 1864, OR Series I, Vol. XLV, Pt. 1, 1131; Speed S. Fry to J. S. Butler, December 2, 1864; W. L. Gross to Speed S. Fry, December 3, 1864; J. Bates Dickson to Stephen G. Burbridge, December 31, 1864, OR, Series I, Vol. XLV, Pt. 2, 28, 41, 454, respectively.
these distressed people.” Based on Burbridge’s wishes, and indeed in keeping with orders he had already issued to Captain Hall, the commissioners recommended the immediate construction at Camp Nelson of a “camp of reception...for them [refugees], both white and colored. The Camp Nelson quartermaster therefore should “make whatever preparations may be proper for their accommodation and care.” Sympathetic commanders such as Burbridge aside, the commissioners concluded their report with a scathing indictment of the military’s attitude toward dependents of the black soldier, “To cheat or starve his family, while he fights to maintain a government which supports the plunderers, is the ostensible business of too many who wear the nation’s livery.” They further concluded that this rough treatment discouraged large numbers of potential recruits in Kentucky, and therefore must be stopped:

They have the right to some kind of assistance, and the government alone has the means and ability to furnish it. If we take colored soldiers into our armies, knowing the condition of the families they leave behind, we must take them under the obligation to take care of the families that would be otherwise left in want. When the enlisting colored soldiers are assured that the care of their families shall be the care of the government, that assurance must be made good. If we exact good faith from them, we must keep good faith with them.22

In the following months, Captain Hall, in his new capacity as superintendent of refugees at Camp Nelson, worked with John G. Fee to establish a community for refugees on the west end of the camp. Hall used his expertise, along with government lumber and the labor of soldiers, to build barracks, which quickly filled up and became overcrowded. Unfortunately, these long, open buildings were hard to heat and encouraged the spread of disease, which was easily the leading killer of both soldiers and civilians during the Civil War. Women and children suffering from the cold and malnutrition quickly succumbed to pneumonia, smallpox, measles, and other

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invisible killers, despite the best efforts of camp surgeon R. S. Mitchell. In time, Fee would convince Hall to build smaller, more compartmentalized housing. Still, throughout the winter of 1865, the new refugee camp struggled to meet even the most basic needs not only of the families of black soldiers but also of a growing number of white refugees from the brutal internecine warfare raging both in the Bluegrass and throughout much of eastern Kentucky. In an odd defense of Brigadier General Fry’s tenure as camp commandant, Thomas Butler of the Sanitary Commission noted that after his removal camp officials demonstrated increased prejudice against white refugees, giving them fewer rations and dilapidated quarters in which to live. The source of this prejudice lay with the assumption by Captain Hall and others that virtually all of these white refugees were disloyal and therefore less deserving of food and shelter.\textsuperscript{23}

Even as the humanitarian crisis at Camp Nelson escalated, many residents of the Bluegrass celebrated the resounding Union victory at Franklin, Tennessee, which eliminated any threat Confederate General John Bell Hood may have posed to the Commonwealth. Indeed, the Confederate ability to wage full-scale war west of the Appalachians had been severely diminished, a prelude to ultimate Union victory the following spring. Additionally, General Burbridge had acquitted himself well in combating mounted units beyond Cumberland Gap in southwestern Virginia, including a victory over Basil Duke, in command of the remnant of Morgan’s men after the famous raider’s death the previous August. Once back in Kentucky, however, Burbridge made rapid changes in federal deployment that further alienated him from state officials. Federal cavalry units, in particular the 11th, 12th, and 30th Kentucky, the 12th Ohio Volunteer, and the 11th Michigan Cavalry now assumed the role of guerrilla hunters. Most

Home Guard and other state militia units were ordered mustered out of service. Burbridge and his superiors did not trust Bramlette, and they voiced suspicion over his several requests, supported by the state legislature, for permission to organize a large state militia. This distrust had been strongly echoed in Ludington’s report, which had in no uncertain terms called for all Kentucky-raised troops to be deployed immediately to other states. Certainly the growing reputations for ruthlessness and lawlessness that followed some of these Guardsmen, and the number of complaints being filed against them by supposedly loyal citizens, placed them out of favor with Burbridge in his ongoing, if futile, efforts to keep the peace.24

Throughout the winter of 1865, guerrillas, including the so-called “girl guerrilla” Sue Mundy, ravaged the Bluegrass. The exploits of Mundy, the she-devil whose daring and ruthlessness shocked and titillated the readers of George D. Prentice’s Louisville Journal, were based on the real activities of a diminutive, long-haired, smooth-faced young man named Jerome Clarke. Looking feminine enough to be mistaken for a woman by some eye witnesses, Clarke had served as one of John Hunt Morgan’s lieutenants during the summer of 1864, after which he chose to stay in Kentucky as leader of his own guerrilla band. As Prentice’s Sue Mundy, he quickly gained infamy for his brazenness and brutality. On January 25, the editor of the Journal reported that Mundy’s band had attacked and scattered a herd of federal cattle near La Grange, in Oldham County, killing some thirty-five black enlisted men serving as drovers and guards, an incident for which two companies of the 12th Kentucky were dispatched to the area. Within six weeks Clarke would find himself standing on the gallows in Louisville, where he reportedly

24 John A. Logan to U. S. Grant, December 17, 1864; Special Orders No. 11, January 12, 1865, Headquarters, Military District of Kentucky; and Charles M. Keyser to Stephen G. Burbridge, January 12, 1865, OR, Series I, Vol. XLV, Pt. 2, 230, 578, respectively. On deployment of federal cavalry to combat guerrillas in the southern Bluegrass and beyond, see J. S. Butler to Major Slater, January 13, 1865; and Butler to Major J. F. Herrick, January 14, 1865, OR, Series I, Vol. XLV, Pt. 2, 585, 593, respectively.
called himself “a regular Confederate soldier” who had captured “many Federal prisoners and have always treated them kindly.” His statement notwithstanding, during that January raid men under his command certainly took no black prisoners. All told, since mid-1864 Kentucky guerrillas had butchered dozens of black enlistees and recruits in similar fashion. Kentucky’s guerrilla hunters imposed their own version of justice when provided an opportunity. A few days after the La Grange raid, a guerrilla captain, “the notorious Dick Taylor, who was the leader of the gang that killed the negroes a few days since below Simpsonville [Anderson County]” was killed in a savage fight with a Home Guardsman that ended in a clash of bowie knives.

The ruthlessness of this guerrilla war cannot be exaggerated. Black soldiers and recruits seldom received quarter from guerrillas, and numerous white Unionists were assassinated. Additionally, several reports mention captured guerrillas who were shot while trying to escape, likely meaning they were removed from public view and summarily executed by their captors. Burbridge had sanctioned such actions, issuing orders that clearly exempted guerrillas from the usual protection accorded to legitimate Confederate prisoners of war. Adding to the intensity of the guerrilla war in early 1865, William Clarke Quantrill, going by the moniker “Captain Clarke,” and a band of Missouri guerrillas arrived in the Bluegrass. Having worn out their welcome in their home state, they slinked across the Mississippi under cover of darkness and headed to Kentucky, donning the blue uniform of the Fourth Missouri Cavalry (US) to avoid suspicion. In the case of “Captain Clarke,” Brigadier General Fry was unequivocal: “Order

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25 J. S. Butler to Colonel Buckley, January 25, 1865; Butler to Speed S. Fry, January 26, 1865, OR, Series I, Vol. XLIX, Pt. 1, 582, 589, respectively; Louisville Journal, January 25, March 16, 1865.
27 Lowell H. Harrison, The Civil War in Kentucky (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky), 76-78. See Major Mahoney to J. S. Butler, January 28; and Thomas A. Howes to Major Mahoney, January 29, 1865, OR, Series I, Vol. XLIX, Pt. 1, 603, 612, respectively.
your men not to take any prisoners.” This was a perfectly legitimate order, given that the guerrillas had disguised themselves as Union cavalry. Federal commanders knew within a couple of days that “Clarke” was Quantrill, and Fry did not want his subordinates to show any quarter or take any chances in dealing with the infamous sacker of Lawrence, Kansas.28

In early February, guerillas in separate raids burned two Bluegrass train depots, robbing citizens in the process, and had federal authorities scrambling to hunt them down.29 Yet Burbridge saw fit to issue still another order for all state troops to be disbanded, despite the fact that the best of those units, Bridgewater’s men, were in hot pursuit of Quantrill after he had raided the town of Hustonville in eastern Lincoln County. Governor Bramlette had at this point had enough, railing in a telegram to Stanton against the “unwarranted assumption of power by an imbecile commander,” a move he believed had been initiated by “those who have long sought to provoke an issue with the State, and which I have prevented.” Burbridge had finally gone too far for the Lincoln administration, and so he received a hasty rebuke from Secretary of War Stanton, followed by orders effectively relieving him of command of the Military District of Kentucky by reorganizing it out from under him. Although some Unionists in Kentucky begged him to retain Burbridge, Lincoln named John M. Palmer of Illinois as the new commander over what would now be called the Military Department of Kentucky, with clear instructions from Stanton to restore order in the Commonwealth, come hell or high water. Palmer stood a strong likelihood of having to deal with both possibilities in the Ohio Valley in 1865.30

28 Speed S. Fry to Major Barnes, January 29, 1865, OR, Series I, Vol. XLIX, Pt. 1, 612.
29 Thomas A. Howes to S. B. Brown; Howes to Major Mahoney; February 2, 1865, OR, Series I, Vol. XLIX, Pt. 1, 634-635.
30 Thomas E. Bramlette to Edwin M. Stanton; Stanton to Stephen G. Burbridge, February 7; Stanton to John M. Palmer, February 8; D. L. Price to Abraham Lincoln, February 11, 1865, all in OR, Series I, Vol. XLIX, Pt. 1, 667, 670-673, 698, respectively.
Both Thomas Bramlette and D. W. Lindsey, who had never really been able to establish a legitimate State Guard, deserved some of the blame for the turbulent state of affairs in the Commonwealth, along with the commander of the District of Kentucky. Still, the Home Guard had a few excellent companies of guerrilla hunters, and though Burbridge utilized that valuable asset from time to time, he failed to support efforts that might have resulted in a more coordinated defense of the state. His superiors concluded that, apart from being stubborn almost to the point of insubordination, he had been a poor manager of his military assets. Indeed, when Palmer took over, inspection reports revealed that Burbridge’s command was “in a disorganized and undisciplined condition, very much scattered, and so distributed as to be of little service, either to maintain domestic peace or afford security against the rebel military forces.” As Bramlette suggested, Burbridge seems to have been more intent on picking fights with leading Unionist Democrats, including the governor, than working with them to resolve internal conflicts. Palmer, a former Democrat who like Lincoln was a Kentucky-born, Illinois raised Republican lawyer, would have his own run-ins with the Bramlette administration.

Ironically, even as Palmer received notice of his new command, Bridgewater’s Guard unit dealt a mortal blow to Quantrill’s band. He had already led an attack in which a dozen of the Missourians had been killed or captured, and now he planned to bag the rest. After destroying a federal wagon train at New Market, south of Lebanon, Marion County, the guerrillas had fled east on the road through Bradfordsville into northern Casey County. They continued east until dark, reaching Lincoln County, where they camped for the night. Bridgewater tracked them down near Hustonville on terrain with which he no doubt was

31 Edwin M. Stanton to John M. Palmer, February 8; General Orders No. 1, February 18, Headquarters, Military Department of Kentucky; Stephen G. Burbridge to W. D. Whipple, February 18, 1865, all in OR, Series I, Vol. XLIX, Pt. 1, 670-673, 741-742, respectively.
32 Rockenbach, “‘War Upon Our Border’,” 208-213.
intimately familiar. His men took even the veteran Quantrill by surprise when they attacked well past midnight. Most of the guerrillas, including “Captain Clarke,” were said to have scrambled into “the woods barefooted,” with Guardsmen hot on their heels. In the dark, many guerrillas escaped, but four were killed in the initial attack, four more in the chase, and thirty-five horses captured. Only a half-dozen or so escaped on horseback, one of whom likely was Quantrill, and the band would never be able to regain its former strength.\textsuperscript{33}

Eventually another Kentucky guerrilla hunter and notorious headline grabber, Edwin Terrell, would bag Quantrill. Terrell, in command of Spencer County Home Guards, reportedly was not above posing as a guerrilla when it suited him, even taking the opportunity while in disguise to rob and plunder in neighboring Nelson County. Complaints lodged against him in late January and early February likely were yet another reason for Burbridge wishing to disband the Home Guard. Palmer seems to have turned a blind eye to complaints against both Terrell and Bridgewater, perhaps realizing that to catch a guerrilla as canny as Quantrill required the services of men willing to become, if not guerrillas themselves, at least reasonable, and at times indistinguishable, facsimiles.\textsuperscript{34}

Burbridge continued in command until Palmer’s arrival in Louisville on late February, but, in a final blow to his efforts in the guerrilla war, he was stripped of most of his prize cavalry units. The 11th and 12th Kentucky, 12th Ohio Volunteers, and 11th Michigan were reassigned to General Stoneman’s command in preparation for his raid into western North Carolina. Upon assuming command, Palmer had to issue an immediate call for troops to replace the departing cavalry regiments. He and Lindsey would work together in the effort to establish a reasonable


force by which to carry on the war against guerrillas, probably because he knew that his political future depended on it. Home Guard Captain Bridgewater’s unit officially became Company A, Hall’s Gap Battalion, in March 1865, when federal authorities commissioned it and other units to aid in the guerrilla war, and he received a major’s commission. Even as he attempted to win the guerrilla war, Palmer would have to deal with the ongoing refugee crisis, as well as the issue of caring for the Union’s many widows and orphans in Kentucky. In his last weeks as commander of the District of Kentucky, Burbridge had gotten a vote of confidence from the Loyal League of Louisville (a chapter of the Union League), while at the same time its representatives expressed their great need for federal aid for “the destitute and suffering...families of Union soldiers, now in our army, and also the suffering...widows and orphans, made so by death of husbands and fathers...fighting the battles of our country.”

The change in command in Kentucky certainly did not bring immediate relief for the families of soldiers of the USCT. Apart from risks and hardships suffered by refugees and soldiers, women who remained enslaved when their husbands enlisted often paid a heavy price at the hands of vindictive Bluegrass slaveholders. Patsey Leach’s husband, Julius, enlisted in the fall of 1864 and became a member of the 5th USC Cavalry. Though he did not own Julius, Patsey’s master nonetheless took his frustration out on her. On one occasion he beat her with a cowhide for “looking at them darned Nigger Soldiers”, a reference to the fact that she had watched a company of Colored Troops march past her master’s Woodford County home. Her husband, who had belonged to a Scott County resident, was killed in action at Saltville soon

thereafter, and once again Patsey’s master turned on her, whipping her on several occasions while expressing his hope “that the last one of the nigger soldiers would be Killed.” Fearing for her life, Patsey finally took the youngest of her five children and ran away to Lexington, seeking to escape the man she called “a Rebel Sympathizer.” In March 1865 she sought the aid of federal authorities in an effort to liberate her other children under the provisions of a new federal law affecting dependents of black soldiers.\footnote{Affidavit of Patsey Leach, March 25, 1865, Registered Letters Received, Assistant Commissioner’s Office, Entry 3379, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Tennessee, Record Group 105 (hereinafter cited as RLRACO, Entry 3379, BRFAL-TN), reprinted with annotation in Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, Leslie Rowland, eds., \textit{Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867, Series II, The Black Military Experience} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 268-269.}

That month Patsey Leach and others had gotten what they had long hoped for in the form of federal legislation emancipating them. A consequence both of the Camp Nelson tragedy and of slaveholders’ abuse of the families of Colored Troops, this law granted immediate freedom to tens of thousands of women and children in Kentucky. By war’s end two thirds of the Commonwealth’s slaves technically had been freed, giving further testament to the flood of black volunteers from Kentucky into the ranks of the USCT.\footnote{Berlin, et al, eds., \textit{Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867, Series I, Volume I, The Destruction of Slavery}, 513; Victor B. Howard, “The Civil War in Kentucky: The Slave Claims His Freedom,” \textit{Journal of Negro History}, 67, 3 (Autumn 1982), 251-254.} Kentucky slaveholders, however, refused to give in to federal legislation without a fight, as illustrated by the case of Clarissa Burdett. She, her husband Ely, and four children “belonged” to Smith Alford of Garrard County. When her husband ran away to join the army, Alford, according to Clarissa, beat “[me] over the head with an axe handle saying as he did so that he beat me for letting Ely…go off.” In her affidavit, Burdett recounted that she also received a beating when her niece fled to Camp Nelson seeking refuge. Finally, Clarissa ran away to join her husband, leaving her children held illegally
in bondage by Alford with little hope of reclaiming them: “that master who would whip me
would not let any of my children go nor would he suffer me [again] to get away.”

Additionally, Kentucky politicians directly defied federal law regarding the status of
wives and children of black soldiers. In April 1865 a Kentucky circuit court judge ruled the act
of Congress liberating soldier’s dependents unconstitutional. While jurists debated the limits of
federal authority, state and local authorities continued to enforce slave codes, keeping women
such as Mary Wilson, wife of Lewis Wilson, 119th Regiment, USCT, in limbo. She had run
away from her master, William Adams, to Lexington, where she lived as a freedwoman. On
May 31, Lexington police arrested her and returned her to Adams. One of the policemen, acting
on Adams’s instructions, stripped off her clothes, tied her up, and beat her severely with a leather
strap. Adams then took his turn wielding the strap. Wilson, undaunted by the beating, ran away
again a few days later. The same policeman again arrested her, returned her to Adams, and again
whipped her with a strap. Finally, though suffering greatly from her whippings, she fled to
Camp Nelson and asked for protection. She left behind a child still held illegally in bondage.

Thanks to stubborn planters like Adams and the state and local authorities who aided
them, slavery, though by the spring of 1865 in its death throes, did not die quietly in the
Bluegrass. But in the aftermath of Appomattox and the tragic assassination of President Lincoln,
defiance of federal authority on the part of the Commonwealth’s politicians and slaveholders
infuriated the commanding officer of the Military Department of Kentucky. In eulogizing
Lincoln, Palmer elevated him to saintly status as “the purest man of the ages.” He then

38 Clarissa Burdett, Affidavit, March 27, 1865, RLRACO, Entry 3379, BRFAL-TN, reprinted
with annotation in Ira Berlin, et al., eds., Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation,
39 Mary Wilson, Affidavit, June 17, 1865, RLRACO, Entry 3379, BRFAL-TN, reprinted with
annotation in Berlin, et al., eds., Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867,
cautioned Kentuckians: “the wicked need not rejoice nor the patriotic despond.” Following Lincoln’s death, Palmer if anything became more determined to crush slavery in Kentucky swiftly and for all time. Of his district, he simply said, “I made up my mind that all that was left of slavery was its mischiefs, and that I would encourage a system of gradual emancipation, a thing that had been desired so long, and which the colored people had pretty well established for themselves.” Reasoning that men who could not restrict the movements of their slaves ceased to be masters, he instituted a pass system in the summer of 1865 that allowed many African Americans to move freely about the state and eventually across the Ohio River to Ohio and Indiana. Thus he rendered vagrancy laws ineffectual and forced Kentucky railroads to provide passage for those bearing passes with few questions asked. When necessary, he resorted to military intervention on behalf of former slaves to enforce federal law.

As a result of “Palmer’s passes,” even though slavery remained legal in the Commonwealth until the end of 1865, it had been dealt a blow from which it had no hope of recovery. A letter from Edmund Bartlett of New Castle, Henry County, to Palmer, dated August 30, 1865, is informative regarding the impact of his policy on the remnants of slavery in the Bluegrass Region:

Early this year, I hired a negro man belonging to Mr. Smith--sometime since he left without provocation, without joining the army and afterward managed to get his wife from my house and a few nights since, in a clandestine manner got 3 of his wife’s children from my house & they were taken to Louisville on the Cars, none of said Negroes, being freed by any Proclamations...

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40 Frankfort Commonwealth, April 18, 1865.
41 Palmer, Personal Recollections, 233-234; Coulter, Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky, 257-267.
42 Edmund Bartlett to Major General Palmer, August 30, 1865, Letters Received, Department of Kentucky (hereinafter cited as LRDKY), Entry 2173, United States Army Continental Command (hereinafter cited as USACC), RG 393; Lucas, History of Blacks in Kentucky, Vol. 1, 178-181.
For all its effectiveness in undermining the last vestiges of the peculiar institution in Kentucky, Palmer’s policy contributed to an even greater humanitarian crisis as refugee centers such as Camp Nelson and urban centers, particularly Louisville. Palmer ordered a temporary home for refugees built on the site of an existing refugee camp just outside of Louisville, no doubt to the chagrin of the city’s predominantly white, Democratic residents. Already chafing from years of federal interference in their daily lives, Louisville’s citizens poured out their wrath on black soldiers and refugees, virtually on a nightly basis. By establishing a more permanent temporary community, Palmer hoped to place a bit more insulation between black refugees and disgruntled white residents. In this camp, he ordered that all unmarried women quickly be married to soldiers in the USCT, if willing, a sham by which he hoped to thwart slaveholders looking to reclaim their property. He also ordered a school to be established for the children.43

Although ordered by Palmer to seek employment, refugees found this difficult as most employers refused to hire them, in keeping with Kentucky laws prohibiting the hiring of runaway slaves. Proof of freedom had to be tangible, not hearsay, and some unscrupulous employers preyed on refugees, hiring them for a set time period then refusing to pay them once they had fulfilled their short-term contract on the grounds that they had no “free papers.” Other cases were even more complex. Wilson Hail [Hale], “a colored refugee,” testified that he had been hired by the proprietors of the Louisville Hotel in July for an undetermined number of months, to be paid twenty-five dollars a month. The first month passed without incident, he collected his pay and so continued to work for the hotel. At the end of the second month, the proprietors refused to pay him, at least not in full, and so he complained to the Bureau. Upon being ordered...

by Freedmen’s Bureau Superintendent H. A. McCaleb to pay Wilson and “refer parties claiming his earnings to this office,” the proprietors replied that they had only been upholding the letter of Kentucky law. Kean, Steele, & Co stated that, after the first month, they had been contacted by one H. Hale of Simpson County, who in fact still legally owned Wilson and thus was entitled to his share of the wages. The employers stated that Wilson had admitted to them that he was owned by Hale, but had refused to accept anything short of full pay for his work. Further, they not so respectfully requested that Louisville Superintendent McCaleb refer the matter to “Maj. Genl. O. O. Howard, Chief of Freedmen’s Bureau Washington City” for a ruling, “and that Your order [to pay Wilson in full] be suspended until his decision be had.” In his endorsement of these letters, which were forwarded to his superior, Clinton B. Fisk, McCaleb points out that, “Unless payment for their labor can be enforced to this class of refugees they will certainly be thrown upon the Government for support.”

As the crisis intensified, Covington, Frankfort, and Lexington also became overcrowded with freed people, and not even more rural county seats such as Paris were immune to the problem of urban refugees, who packed into any shelter they could find and lived hand to mouth, hoping for timely relief. Some starving freedmen no doubt resorted to theft simply to stay alive, but such desperate acts led to an increase in racial tensions, particularly among poor whites who themselves could ill afford to lose a single chicken or shoat. The mayor of Paris, frustrated by the presence of so many unemployed freed people, wrote, “The great desideratum is to rid

ourselves of a population that will not labor but simply exist as a nuisance…. Where they go or to whom they are sent is a matter of little moment to us.\footnote{Major General John M. Palmer to B. F. Bullen, Mayor of Paris, KY, August 22, 1865, Letters Sent, Department of Kentucky, Entry 2164, USACC, RG 393, reprinted with annotation in Berlin, et al, eds., Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867, Series I, Volume I, The Destruction of Slavery, 639-641.} As illustrated above, the mayor’s assertion regarding the unwillingness of refugees to work for a living was far from accurate. The stubborn refusal of Kentuckians to accept what was self-evident, that slavery was dead, led them to disregard with malicious intent the plight of these refugees by hamstringing those desperately needed laborers and wanted to hire them. Even as this urban refugee crisis raged, a new, sinister stratagem emerged in the countryside, whereby thousands of rural freed people would be uprooted and driven from the countryside to wherever they might find a modicum of relief.

The conflict between James H. Bridgewater and Judge Davis of Spencer County also had heightened in intensity by the spring of 1865, and by its nature it symbolized the conflict in the Bluegrass over the fate of slavery. Davis wrote to Kentucky Adjutant General D. W. Lindsey that he feared for his life, and he accused Bridgewater of relieving him of a young male slave: “On the 29th day of March last a portion of Major James H. Bridgewater’s command called at my premises in Spencer County and took with them a Negro boy about 13 years of age.” Davis further accused Bridgewater of wanting to keep the slave as his personal servant, rather than liberate him from bondage. Then he made a telling statement concerning the extent to which slaveholders could either delude themselves or attempt to mislead others regarding ideas of paternal benevolence: “Whether he went voluntarily or by force I am not able to say, but this
much I do know, I had never heard him express dissatisfaction with his home but on the contrary he was apparently as contented as any member of the white family.  

Kentucky’s slaveholders, like those throughout the South, expressed shock and dismay when confronted with the reality that their slaves wanted not only to be free but also independent of their former masters. Once faced with this reality, many Bluegrass slaveholders aligned themselves with groups of self-proclaimed “Negro Regulators” in order to make sure that their former slaves, though now free, did not achieve either real independence or equality. These bands of white supremacists would find surprising freedom to carry out their campaign in the Bluegrass and elsewhere due to the Commonwealth’s determination to rid itself of any vestiges of federal interference. The resulting political and social realignment indicates a rapid identity shift in which a majority of white Kentuckians came to view themselves no longer as Westerners or even Mid-Westerners but as Southerners, a shift that already was well underway in nearby Missouri.

In 1865 legal action swelled as Kentuckians sued each other for war reparations, especially concerning loss or confiscation of property. Bridgewater’s younger brother and trusted lieutenant, John, was indicted on charges of grand larceny at this time. Additionally, returning Confederates quickly rose to prominence in their hometowns. For example, Henry L. Stone of Bath County, who rode with John Hunt Morgan, wrote his family in June of his intentions to return home and begin a law practice, noting, “I shall have all the patronage that a

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46 Jonathan Davis to D. W. Lindsey, May 17, 1865, Hall’s Gap BN, Evidence against Maj. Bridgewater, Quartermaster & Adjutant General Papers [Kentucky Military History Museum, Frankfort, Kentucky (hereinafter cited as Q&AG Papers, KMHM)].
young lawyer could desire...I think ‘we rebels’ will be as popular as any class in Ky. ere long; we are apparently so now.”

This changing legal and political landscape put pressure on Governor Bramlette and his administration. After further complaints from Judge Davis, D. W. Lindsey apparently called Bridgewater on the carpet in July 1865. The subordinate officer responded by stating, “I have tried very hard to serve my state with fidelity and have risked my life on more than one occasion to maintain the law and now to be commented on so severely without a chance to make an explanation savors pretty strongly of ingratitude.” In a separate letter he notified Lindsey of the deteriorating state of affairs in Lincoln County. A number of well-armed former rebel soldiers, sporting several revolvers each, had returned home to Crab Orchard and beat up Herbert King’s lone surviving son. Bridgewater called for action, but instead he received word that his unit was being disbanded.

In the Bluegrass, the War of the Rebellion was over, but for the former guerrilla hunter and other staunch Unionists, the fight over which state-level faction would rule in post-war Kentucky, dubbed by E. Merton Coulter as “the war after the war,” had just begun. This, too, would be a guerrilla war, with Regulators and “Judge Lynch’s Men” serving as the shock troops for Kentucky’s reunited and decidedly southern Democratic Party. Indeed, many of these men appear to have been wartime guerrillas, and they quickly discovered that the tactics they had mastered during the war could be adapted to this new struggle. Caught in the middle of this fight over who would rule at home, particularly at the local level in the form of sheriffs, constables,

48 Henry L. Stone to his Father & Mother, June 20, 1865, Stone Collection, FHS.
49 James H. Bridgewater to D. W. Lindsey, July 18, 1865 (quote), Hall’s Gap BN, Major Bridgewater; James H. Bridgewater to D. W. Lindsey, July 8, 1865, Hall’s Gap BN, Correspondence, both in Q&AG Papers, KMHM.
50 Kentucky Advocate, November 2, 1997, C2; November 9, 1997, C2; partial letter from J. H. Bridgewater to D. W. Lindsey, ?, 1865, Hall’s Gap BN, Major Bridgewater, Q&AG Papers, KMHM; Coulter, Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky, 286.
magistrates, and judges, freed people would suffer unspeakable outrages, and numerous Unionists would pay with their lives for trying to resist the post-emancipation Regulator reign of terror about to be unleashed.
Resistance to federal policy in Kentucky received a boost from the return of thousands of heavily armed “rebels” to the Commonwealth in 1865. In point of fact, many of these so-called “rebels” had never actually left the state, or even become thorough-going Confederates. Throughout much of the Civil War, Kentucky experienced intense guerrilla warfare, characterized by small mounted bands of night riders, some of which identified themselves as Confederate, some Unionist, and some of which were only loosely affiliated and thus, for all practical purposes, gangs of common outlaws. Many acts of violence by Regulators, particularly theft, house burning, and mock lynching, closely resembled terror tactics utilized by anti-Union guerrillas who operated during the war. Given the frequent references by Freedmen’s Bureau agents to Regulators as former Confederates or rebels, it is safe to assume that many of these men had honed their skills attacking Kentucky Unionists and now made freedpersons and those who sought to aid them their primary targets.¹ These Confederates no doubt joined ranks with numerous conditional Unionists who had grown bitter over federal policy, particularly as implemented by generals Burbridge and Palmer, in the Commonwealth.

Conversely, African Americans in the Bluegrass, including those still legally enslaved, began to evidence a new sense of freedom. On July 4, 1865, tens of thousands of slaves and freedmen alike gathered at various urban locations throughout the Bluegrass to celebrate the

nation’s independence, and their own. A day-long celebration in Louisville began with a parade of thousands of African Americans through the city’s streets led by the 123rd Regiment, United States Colored Infantry. That afternoon, John M. Palmer arrived riding on a chariot and received a thunderous ovation. He proceeded to give a speech in which he attacked both slavery and slaveholders, noting that, for all practical purposes, slavery was dead in Kentucky. Many of the slaves who heard his words believed that he had just freed them. The policies of Major General Palmer, commanding officer of the Military Department of Kentucky after February 1865, had allowed many African Americans to take to the road, utilizing “free passes” distributed by Palmer, first in Louisville then throughout the state. With the pass system, he hoped to subvert the Commonwealth’s refusal to abide by federal law and policy regarding slavery. Urban areas, particularly Louisville, became rallying points for black refugees, some free, others technically runaway slaves who either believed themselves already free or expected to be freed at any time. In reality, despite their own and Palmer’s best efforts most African Americans in Kentucky found themselves stuck somewhere between slavery and freedom throughout 1865, held there at least in part by violent resistance to emancipation on the part of white supremacists and irate slaveholders.2

In post-Civil War Kentucky, organized bands of white men calling themselves “Negro Regulators” utilized mock lynchings, beatings, whippings, house wrecking or burning, rape, emasculation, and murder in their efforts to establish social, economic, and political relationships

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based on white supremacy. Slavery “had sufficiently if imperfectly sustained racial hierarchy, but with the demise of slavery, the maintenance of this hierarchy through other means became essential to white southerners.” Initially, many disgruntled slaveholders actively supported this terror campaign as a way of retaliating against federal interference in Kentucky. Unionists who had supported slavery and naively had hoped to save it by not seceding grew increasingly outraged at the prospect of forced emancipation in the form of the Thirteenth Amendment. Practical slaveholders, who conceded the demise of slavery but had been holding out for compensated emancipation or at least the hope of receiving a bounty for each slave who had joined the army, also became outraged as their hopes went unrealized. Many of these slaveholders espoused the opinion that, since the federal government seemed intent on freeing Kentucky’s slaves, it should additionally take responsibility for feeding and housing them, and so they drove off their former slaves. Still, resistance to emancipation proved fierce in the Commonwealth. The Kentucky legislature, controlled by representatives who opposed federal intervention, adamantly refused to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment, and over sixty-five thousand African Americans remained legally held in bondage until the formal end of slavery in Kentucky on December 26, 1865. Other slaveholders used force and intimidation to keep their former slaves in a virtual state of slavery for years after emancipation.

In the week following his famous chariot ride, Palmer received a letter from the mayor of Frankfort describing the situation in the state capital regarding black refugees, “the city is now densely crowded with them--I am brought seriously to apprehend that disease and sickness of a most serious character is to be the consequence.” Mayor Gavin wanted Palmer to order African Americans to move to the suburbs, but Palmer refused and instead arranged for their transportation to other states. The situation in Kentucky was not unique; emancipation was met with resistance across the South, and free African Americans faced new challenges and threats as they sought to build new lives for themselves.

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Americans to return to the farms of the Bluegrass, where laborers were sorely needed.\textsuperscript{5} This would seem a logical approach, and certainly one that later would be endorsed by the Freedmen’s Bureau. And yet this was by no means a simple or safe option for Kentucky’s free black population. While urban conditions were horrific and resulted in much loss of life, in the countryside terror reigned supreme in the form of vengeful bands of white supremacists, some of whom seemed intent on driving all persons of color from their rural communities. In the meantime, the Union Army continued to recruit in Kentucky through the first half of 1865, but recruits were quickly shipped off to join regiments stationed elsewhere, thus rendering them unavailable to intervene on behalf of the Commonwealth’s black population. As a result of federal policy regarding both the deployment and the mustering out of black troops, older men, women, and children bore the brunt of racial violence in the Bluegrass throughout the summer of 1865 as slaveholders and their night-riding allies vented their frustration with Palmer’s policies and other aspects of martial law.\textsuperscript{6}

Indeed, Palmer’s actions created a backlash that brought much suffering to Kentucky’s African American population. Although perhaps as many as 30,000 former slaves fled the state with his passes (Palmer estimated at least 20,000), more than five times that number remained in the Commonwealth by the end of 1865. Of these, two thirds technically were free after March, but many of them were kept in various states of servitude. Others received freedom and little

\textsuperscript{5} G. W. Gavin to Genl. Palmer, Frankfort, Kentucky, July 7, 1865, Letters Received, Department of Kentucky (hereinafter cited as LRDKY), Entry 2173, United States Army Continental Command, Record Group 393 (National Archives, Washington, D.C.) (hereinafter cited as USACC, RG 393); Stephen I. Rockenbach, “‘War Upon Our Border’: War and Society in Two Ohio Valley Communities, 1861-1865” (University of Cincinnati: Ph. D. Diss., 2005), 212-215; E. Merton Coulter, \textit{The Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky} (Chapel: The University of North Carolina Press, 1926), 262.

else. For example, while some slaveholders fought to keep people in bondage, others simply turned out women, children, and elderly black men to fend for themselves. As a result, refugee centers such as Camp Nelson, south of Lexington, became flooded with sick and starving African Americans, and cities and towns became crowded with others hoping to find work. Their hopes were dashed, for the most part, because many employers refused to hire anyone who might technically be a runaway. These urban refugees crowded into any shelter they could find and lived hand to mouth, hoping for timely relief. Again, their hopes were dashed, as relief was not forthcoming. In desperation, many among the urban poor resorted to theft simply to stay alive, but such desperate acts led to an increase in racial tensions, as did any attempt on the part of freed people to push beyond the boundaries being set for them by local authorities.  

At the Boyle County Fair in September, a riot started when a group of black attendees, including both civilians and soldiers, tried to make their way out of the “ring” imposed upon them by the town marshal. Immediately upon breaking this segregating barrier, the black men were accosted by an angry group of white men, reputedly armed with revolvers and bowie knives. A man named Moore, who later claimed that one of the black men had drawn first, opened fire and wounded one of the black men. Several shots were exchanged, after which the black men made a break for the gate. One of them, a sergeant in the USCT, fell into the hands of the white mob, at which point Brigadier General Speed S. Fry, in attendance at the fair, tried to intervene. The villain of the Camp Nelson expulsion and the hapless sergeant very nearly lost their lives in the next moment as guns were placed to both their heads. A marshal named

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Simpson saved them by bullying into the crowd and knocking gun arms into the air. Several pistols went off, and in the confusion the sergeant broke away and ran for his life. Moore dashed off in pursuit, but neither caught nor inflicted injury upon the fleeing freedman. A brief military investigation concluded that both Fry and Simpson had done all they could to protect the black men. They also concluded that none of the soldiers had acted in such a way as to incite the near riot. Immediately after the attack, however, soldiers had raced back to their camp, grabbed their rifles and reinforcements, and begun to make their way back to the fairgrounds. An officer managed to stop them, thereby preventing a pitched battle in Danville that night.8

Additionally, Palmer’s tactics from the summer election came back to haunt him as he received complaints from Unionists that returning Confederates had begun to sue Union men for reporting them as such, thereby insuring that they could not vote in that important state election. Though Democrats, building on the foundation of the anti-Lincoln faction from 1864, had carried the day on August 7, their margins of victory were too close, a fact many attributed to widespread interference on the part of Palmer and Governor Bramlette. In particular, Palmer utilized military assets to prevent returning Confederates, even those who had been in the state for some time, from voting. Palmer went too far for Bramlette, who shifted allegiance on the eve of the election in the forlorn hope of maintaining some legitimacy in the face of a Democratic victory. Over the next two years, he would repeatedly fail in such attempts to bolster his centrist Conservative Union Party, as even more conservative Democrats welcomed into their ranks not only former Confederates but known guerrillas and Regulators. In the flood of litigation spawned both by the summer election and by state policy allowing wronged parties to sue for war reparations, not only Palmer but also the governor himself would be sued for damages by

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8 Brigadier General Brisbin to General Palmer, September 30, 1865, LRDKY, Entry 2173, USACC, RG 393.
disgruntled residents of the Bluegrass. After enduring the commands of both Burbridge and Palmer, many Kentuckians resolved to resist violently any future attempt by the federal government to intrude in state affairs. The Freedmen’s Bureau, taking over from the Military Department of Kentucky much of the responsibility for protection of former slaves, would bear the brunt of that backlash, along with freed people themselves, against whom a minority of white Kentuckians unleashed a terror war.

While numerous white Kentuckians attempted to impose strict limits on black liberation, particularly on those freedmen who had served in the army, others continued to impose slavery on the freed dependents of soldiers. Not long after the Danville incident, Palmer received a plea from the wartime guerrilla hot spot of Lebanon, Marion County, calling for military intervention on behalf of women and children of Colored Troops who were being “reclaimed into slavery” by their former masters. Other reports from 1865 suggest that a few slaveholders even tried to re-enslave soldiers of the USCT. Despite ample evidence of such defiance, and despite Kentucky’s refusal to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment, President Johnson ordered an end to martial law in the Commonwealth on October 12, 1865. That Johnson did so even after a delegation of freedmen had traveled to Washington in the summer of 1865 to beg him both to retain General Palmer and to maintain martial law in the Commonwealth should come as no surprise, given the attitude with which the president regarded freedmen during his tenure.

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10 James M. Fidler to John M. Palmer, October 25, and Fidler to E. B. Harlan, October 27, 1865, both in LRDKY, Entry 2173, USACC, RG 393.

As “one of the few federal actions white Kentuckians applauded” during this era, the end of martial law in the Bluegrass, if anything, only encouraged post-war marauders to be more audacious. Palmer approved the employment of detectives to aid in tracking down guerrillas who continued to harass federal authorities. As if in cue to justify the hiring of these detectives, in November, a pair of saboteurs staged a train wreck on the line from Lexington to Louisville involving two military trains. The lead train signaled its intent to stop at a station, and the following train acknowledged, showing every indication of stopping to wait on the lead train. But once the lead train stopped, the following train began to speed up as it neared the station. Two men were seen jumping from the engine at that time. The following train rammed into the back of the lead train, killing several soldiers.12

As martial law came to an end, the Freedmen’s Bureau expanded its operations in the Commonwealth. As early as June 1865, Major General Oliver O. Howard, Commissioner, had contacted Major General Clinton B. Fisk, Assistant Commissioner for the Tennessee district, and instructed him also to take charge of Bureau operations in Kentucky. Given that by law some persons remained enslaved there, he could do little to intercede in the first months. Still, Fisk immediately began building an organization and made ready to conduct a thorough inspection of the state once the Thirteenth Amendment had been ratified. On December 7, 1865, General Palmer issued a proclamation that, in accordance with the about to be ratified constitutional amendment, all remaining Kentucky slaves now were free. Palmer’s decree, though premature by a few days, nonetheless formally marked the end of slavery in his department. Almost immediately some white Kentuckians sought to impose a new hierarchy in the absence of

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slavery, and they would continue to do so in an increasingly organized manner throughout the following year.\(^\text{13}\)

On Christmas Day, a surgeon at the military hospital in Jefferson County reported, “a dangerous movement against negroes is on foot in Jeffersonville.” Shots had been fired at one unarmed black soldier as he walked along the road that passed the hospital and the same “gang of rowdies” had beaten a second black soldier nearly to death on the same road.\(^\text{14}\) Not only did newly freed slaves face racial violence, they also faced significant economic hurdles. In January, reports came to Palmer regarding the condition of freedmen in Shelby, Spencer, and Anderson Counties. Freed in mid winter by the Thirteenth Amendment, many former slaves suffered greatly from lack of income at precisely the moment when they needed it to start new lives for themselves and their families.\(^\text{15}\)

In the Bluegrass, former slaves desperately needed aid and protection from the Freedmen’s Bureau. As a group of free black men from the Stamping Ground, a community in Scott Country, declared in February: “We are mobed & beat & our houses pulled down on us & turned out of dores in the Cold & we have no portection from the whites of this naborhood. We are all Slaves in this naborhood & we have nothing to live on & must perish with out some portection.”\(^\text{16}\) Historian George C. Wright has argued convincingly that, in the first ten years


\(^{14}\) M. Goldsmith to Captain, December 25, 1865, LRDKY, Entry 2173, USACC, RG 393.

\(^{15}\) J. M. Nolan to John M. Palmer, January 12, 1866, LRDKY, Entry 2173, USACC, RG 393.

after emancipation, “violence perpetrated by” white supremacists in the Commonwealth “would equal in ferocity and frequency the attacks on Afro-Americans anywhere in the Old Confederacy.” Yet, because his chapter on Reconstruction focused almost exclusively on lynching, he only briefly discussed the many other forms of racial violence employed by Regulators. Further, he did not analyze the extent to which nineteenth century constructions of gender, particularly manhood, may have been a factor in motivating white supremacists to use violent means to prevent formerly enslaved persons from establishing themselves as free men and women. Finally, his study gave scant attention to the plight of Kentuckians who supported or worked for the Freedmen’s Bureau and the intense community conflicts in which they often were embroiled. These men put themselves in harm’s way by attempting to aid and protect freed people, and some of them paid the ultimate price, along with numerous freed people, in the Commonwealth’s ongoing internal civil war.17

Assistant Commissioner Fisk set out on a fact-finding mission in January 1866 to gain information regarding the needs of freed people in the state. With a keen sense of what awaited him, he wrote, “I have thrown out my skirmishers and hope to engage Kentucky in a good fight for the right.” Fisk’s tour took him first to Louisville, where winter had begun taking its toll on the ever-increasing numbers of freedpersons gathered there searching for work. Next he

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journeyed to the capital at Frankfort where he met with Governor Bramlette and some of the
state’s most prominent planters to talk about solutions to the labor problem in the aftermath of
slavery. Finally, he went to Lexington, where he witnessed first-hand the results of racial
violence as he visited with victims of several recent attacks. While in Lexington, Fisk compiled
a number of letters of complaint and reports from Bureau agents, mostly from Bluegrass
counties, that he used to construct a stunning indictment on the state of affairs in Kentucky.\(^\text{18}\)

Fisk noted that mobs had murdered more than a few unfortunate freedmen, sometimes in
the most brutal ways imaginable. One gang roasted a former slave alive in hot coals, front and
back, but pulled him out before he died and thus prolonged his agony. He endured several days
before succumbing to his injuries. The Bureau received several other reports of freedmen being
burned alive and numerous reports of freedmen being shot.\(^\text{19}\) In response to these and other
outrages, in February 1866 he expanded the Bureau’s capabilities by setting up sub-districts for
the purpose of recruiting local agents and coordinating local efforts to intercede on behalf of
embattled and impoverished freed people. Reports gathered within the jurisdiction of the
Lexington and Louisville sub-districts indicated that former veterans had been targeted for
violence with great frequency. Many veterans were robbed, with one perpetrator going so far as
to demand that the soldier disrobe and give him his blue uniform. Some veterans, like Peter
Branford of Mercer County, were shot and killed “without cause or provocation.” Other
returning veterans received beatings, whippings, or had their lives threatened simply for

\(^{18}\) Clinton B. Fisk to O. O. Howard, December 29, 1865, reel 21, Registers and Letters Received
by the Commissioner of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872,
National Archives Microfilm Publication M752 (hereinafter cited as R&LRC, BRFAL, [M752])

\(^{19}\) Fisk to Howard, February 14, 1866, reel 21, R&LRC, BRFAL, M752; Clinton B. Fisk to O. O.
Howard, March 12, 1866, reel 28, R&LRC, BRFAL, M752. These letters are closely related.
The Feb. 14 letter is a synopsis of outrages, the March 12 letter is a 100+ page narrative report of
those outrages, compiled from the reports of several subordinates.
attempting to locate and reconstitute their families. Veterans frequently purchased their rifles as they mustered out, no doubt with forethought toward protection of households and communities. However, possession of firearms placed freedmen at odds with Kentucky state laws prohibiting black men from bearing arms. Many local law enforcement officers routinely seized arms from returning veterans of the USCT near train stations or in other public spaces, sometimes ruthlessly enforcing the law by shooting any freedman who did not immediately disarm.20

In the face of such audacious resistance to emancipation, the Bureau attempted to negotiate labor contracts in keeping with their policy to bring a free labor system to the Bluegrass, hopefully with the cooperation of many former slaveholders who now desperately needed to hire laborers in preparation for spring planting. In February 1866, John Ely received notice from Fisk that he had been assigned to duty as the chief superintendent of the Lexington Sub-district. Fisk provided clear instructions as to what he expected from Ely:

The mission of the Bureau is to aid in adjustment of the new relations arising from the abolition of slavery, to promote industry, peace, good order, and education, and to secure impartial justice to all men.... I desire that Superintendents be chosen in all cases from among citizens of the county for which they are appointed, provided faithful, capable and honest men can be found.... Superintendents should be eminently just men who are thoroughly acquainted with both whites and blacks, have the confidence of both, and will labor earnestly, honestly and fearlessly to promote the common welfare.

Fisk anticipated that Ely would be able to enlist the aid of numerous “wealthy and intelligent slaveholders” who would be willing to “treat the freedmen justly and generously.” Finally, he encouraged Ely to “secure the co-operation of such citizens, and endeavor to create an active, healthy sentiment against the numerous outrages that are being perpetrated upon freedmen by that class of citizens whose resistance to freedom and justice makes...the Bureau’s interference a

20 J. M. Nolan to John M. Palmer, February 2, 1866, LRDKY, Entry 2173, USACC, RG 393; Fisk to Howard, Feb. 14, 1866, reel 21, R&LRC, BRFAL, M752; Fisk to Howard, March 29, 1866, reel 28, R&LRC, BRFAL, M752. Original emphasis.
necessity.” Ely immediately issued several circulars instructing agents regarding use of such contracts, as well as calling for “the co-operation and assistance of the State civil authorities, local magistrates, and all good citizens...in aid of the fair, impartial and just administration of the business of the Bureau throughout this Sub-District.”21

Fisk’s optimism aside, Ely would encounter great resistance to the Bureau’s attempts to put freed people back to work on Bluegrass farms. A report from northern Kentucky sheds light on the problems faced by freed people in the countryside. Noting that Covington had some four thousand freed people living in its vicinity, John S. Graham stated that most of them could not find work. In the urban setting, they could not compete with white laborers, and if they found employment, they worked for lower wages than a white laborer might expect. Employment opportunities existed out in the country, where farmers needed laborers, but “a Band of men styling themselves ‘Negro Regulators’” prevented freed people from going back into the countryside to seek employment. Graham stated that any persons for whom he succeeded in finding agricultural work invariably returned in a few weeks “all beaten and bruised by these Regulators.” Local authorities provided no help, according to Graham, being either returned Confederates or, worse, southern sympathizers who had never left the area.22

Another report, sent to Fisk by J. R. Lewis of the Inspector General’s Office in May 1866, illustrates the extent to which post-emancipation violence disrupted economic relations between some planters and their workers. On or about March 25, for example, a half dozen or so white men in disguises had attacked “a quiet well behaved laboring colored family.” The gang

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21 Clinton B. Fisk to John Ely, February 12; General Order No. 1, February 14; and Circular No. 1, February 19, 1866, Headquarters, Lexington Sub-district, Bureau Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, all in LRDKY, Entry 2173, USACC, RG 393
22 John. S. Graham to R. E. Johnston, Sept. 24, 1866, ULRLCS&CSCO, Entry 1186, BRFAL-KY.
forced the family outside, destroyed their house, and then raped the two freedwomen. In the end, “the whole family [was] driven away.” The report contains numerous other cases in which gangs of whites destroyed the houses of freed people and drove them off. It also recounts the fate of a returned soldier whose former master had hired him to work on his farm. On May 1, 1866, the freedman rode to town for supplies on one of his boss’s horses. A white man confronted him on the outskirts of town and shot him dead. The assailant turned himself in immediately to the local authorities. He testified to the magistrate that the horse had been stolen from him earlier, and seeing the freedman on it, he supposed him to be the horse thief and shot him in a fit of rage. The judge released the gunman on five hundred dollars’ bail, and he promptly fled the region. Only later did the sheriff discover that the horse had never belonged to the gunman.23

Although the above-mentioned sheriff may have been acting in good faith, Bureau agents maintained a near-constant litany of complaint to their superiors that they received little or no cooperation from civil authorities. Invariably they asked for more troops with which to reverse the tide of racial violence. John S. Graham reported from Covington that in the summer of 1866 in Boone County, “there are many cases in which Negroes are still held as slaves.” He requested troops to help him apprehend “the outlaws” in his jurisdiction. He also noted that he had been unable to appoint a local citizen as agent for Boone County “on account of the intense hostility to the Bureau on the part of the citizens who being a lawless class do not hesitate at any means to rid themselves of the presence of an Agent of the Bureau.”24 J. W. Read, the Bureau superintendent in Cynthiana, commented on his situation thusly, “I cannot see much chance for the Negroes to get any Protection from Civil authority here as they are shure to put Returned

23 J. R. Lewis to Clinton B. Fisk, May 15, 1866, reel 28, R&LRC, BRFAL, M752.
24 James H. Rice to R. E. Johnston, July 15, 1866, ULRLCS&CSCO, Entry 1186, BRFAL-KY.
Rebel Soldiers in to fill all the County Offices this next election with but few exceptions.”  
Concerning outrages committed against freed people in the vicinity of Maysville, Mason County, Superintendent C. J. True reported that the civil authorities “have never made any attempts to punish or even arrest the guilty parties, so far as my knowledge is concerned. The consequence is that they (the Freedmen) have no protection except through the officers of this Bureau.”

Evidence compiled by the Freedmen’s Bureau indicates that most white Kentuckians initially failed to resist this terror campaign even though some were doubtless directly harmed by it. As the above examples illustrate, Bluegrass planters attempting to rebuild Kentucky’s agricultural economy suffered from a significant loss of African American laborers in the process. Slaveholders had lost half of their able-bodied male slaves to the USCT in 1864 and 1865, and their agricultural output precipitously declined. Most planters operated mixed-crop farms, not large plantations, but they depended on black labor to make their farms profitable, which in part explains why many stubbornly and violently resisted any form of emancipation. By the time the Freedmen’s Bureau established a viable presence in the Bluegrass, planters stood somewhat at odds with the bands of white marauders seeking to drive blacks from farm and field. Early in 1866 some planters, as Fisk had predicted, quickly moved to negotiate labor contracts with their former slaves, and the Freedmen’s Bureau gladly stepped in to aid these negotiations. However, racial violence committed by white supremacists against free black households drove off many potential wage laborers or tenant farmers, insuring that 1866 would also witness a substandard agricultural output.

25 J. W. Read to R. E. Johnston, July 26, 1866, ULRLCS&CSCO, Entry 1186, BRFAL-KY.  
26 C. J. True to R. E. Johnston, Sept. 30, 1866, ULRLCS&CSCO, Entry 1186, BRFAL-KY.  
Despite the many reports of attacks on freed people, Assistant Commissioner Fisk concluded initially that the majority of whites in Kentucky seemed to possess “an honest desire to adjust on a fair basis to the new relations arising from the abolition of slavery.” He realized, however, that the Freedmen’s Bureau, as the latest manifestation of federal interference in the state, enjoyed little popular support. In fact, the state legislature had already passed numerous resolutions calling for its removal. At the same time, white supremacists violently resisted Bureau efforts to establish schools and other services for freed people. Even though a majority of white Kentuckians may have been willing to accept emancipation, Fisk noted that they remained unwilling to intervene on behalf of freedpersons in the face of racial violence.\textsuperscript{28} And yet he failed to understand the extent to which many Democrats in post-emancipation Kentucky, like their counterparts in the former Confederate states, not only condoned but viewed as necessary and legitimate violent acts designed to restore order as they defined it in a given community. Formal attacks against the Bureau, combined with a widespread terror campaign designed to force freedpersons and any whites who tried to defend them out of Kentucky, or at least out of a given community, seemed to indicate that a powerful minority of Kentuckians wanted literally to make their communities white in the aftermath of emancipation. Like many former Confederates in the South, these Kentuckians attempted to construct a post-war society based on the idea that, because blacks were inferior to whites, the two races could not peacefully coexist unless whites exercised rigid control over blacks and kept them in a subservient status. If that status could not be maintained after emancipation, then freed people had to be driven off.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{28} Fisk to Howard, Feb. 14, reel 21, R&LRC, BRFAL, M752.
For their part, Regulators initially used simple tactics: prevent anyone from hiring or aiding freedmen so that they would be forced to leave the state. Those who did not flee could expect to be visited by bands of night riders. Enough murders occurred to make the threat of lethal violence highly plausible. A report from John J. Evans, Freedmen’s Bureau agent in Mt. Sterling, is illustrative. Working in a county that had been plagued by guerrillas during the war, Evans, noting that he himself was in great danger, asked for troops to counter “a gang of whites who as I understand call themselves Regulators.” This band, against which civil authorities in Montgomery County would take no action, intended that “No Negro or White Man shall stay or live in that Section of Country unless he be of their class (a Rebel).” As evidence of this Regulator policy, Evans noted that a white man in Owingsville had taken the life of a black man. Federal troops had been stationed in Mt. Sterling earlier, but Evans had sent them back to Lexington, thinking the situation improved. As soon as the soldiers moved out of the area, the band of Regulators resurfaced.\(^\text{30}\) Given that the Freedman’s Bureau in Kentucky never had sufficient troops to establish garrisons everywhere needed, this frustrating cycle characterized the experience of most field agents.

Regulators not only murdered numerous Unionists and freed people, but also used a wide variety of other tools in imposing their reign of terror on the Bluegrass. Armed bands of white men disarmed, robbed, and whipped freedmen, particularly former soldiers, and they did not spare their families equally rough treatment. Attacks on households, particularly those that included veterans of the USCT, provide clues as to the role of violence in maintaining a white supremacist social hierarchy. These freedmen represented the most direct affront to many white males in Kentucky. Having demonstrated their capacity to become excellent soldiers, returning

\(^{30}\) John J. Evans to R. E. Johnston, October 2, 1866, ULRLCS&CSCO, Entry 1186, BRFAL-KY. Original emphasis.
veterans of the USCT gave the lie to the myth that African Americans constituted a perpetual “mudsill” class, that is, a class of society fit only for servitude. With combat training and, in some cases, experience, these men represented the most direct physical threat to white supremacy when they came home to the Commonwealth. Other black men became targets because, like former soldiers, they represented black independence and autonomy. For example, Regulators beat and robbed a black preacher, then made him watch as they raped his wife. Finally, they shot him in the head, killing him. Another band kicked and stomped to death a freedman because he owned his own land.31

Like the few freedmen who owned their own land, the many freedmen who rented land also represented a challenge to white male supremacy. By controlling even to a degree their own means of subsistence and production, these freedmen competed with poor whites for clientage with wealthy patrons, and as such they and their households became targets for racial violence. In Bath County a gang of five white men robbed a returned soldier who had rented a piece of land and had the means to employ another freedman, also a former soldier, as his laborer. The white men came to his house at night and opened fire on him, grazing his head with two balls. His wounds, literally very close shaves, proved minor and apparently the assailants did not necessarily mean to kill him, as they easily could have done so after wounding him. Instead, they robbed him of “meat clothes and money to the amount of thirteen dollars in silver.”32 Likewise, Stephen Jeffers reported to W. R. Bourne, the Freedmen’s Bureau agent in Danville, that four white men came to his house, threatened his life if he did not let them in, and proceeded to rob him of a feather bed, eight dresses, dishes, and “such other goods as they could carry on their horses.” Jeffers and his family had hired ten acres of land south of Danville, paying two

31 Fisk to Howard, Feb. 14, 1866, reel 21, R&LRC, BRFAL, M752.
32 J. E. Rice to Clinton B. Fisk, February 19, 1866, ULRLCS&CSCO, Entry 1186, BRFAL-KY.
years’ rent in advance, but they had to abandon it or risk a more deadly return visit. This pattern of violence against community leaders and economically independent freedmen and their families is consistent with the pattern of Klan violence in the former Confederate states, as well as racial violence in other border states, including Maryland. Such “attacks on black people were frequently gratuitous and arbitrary; but they were not random, nor did they represent the caprice of deranged or especially malignant individuals. They had a clear logic, which most white people understood perfectly and accepted with little question.”

Additionally, Regulators used Kentucky law to full advantage, sometimes going so far as to pose as legitimate authorities in their efforts to disarm freedmen. One group “visited the houses occupied by freedmen at Yellmanville, near Lexington, and demanded admission claiming they were ordered from Louisville” to search the houses and seize any firearms found within. Among other weapons, they confiscated an Enfield rifle from a veteran of the USCT and broke it into pieces. At one point they opened fire on two freedmen, wounding one in the ear. At least one free black resident of Yellmanville identified several members of the band of Regulators as men from the Lexington area, and the Freedmen’s Bureau quickly determined that these men had no official permission to conduct such a search and seizure operation. The investigating Bureau agent concluded that the men simply “desired to have the Negroes defenceless in case they should attempt further outrages upon them.”

As both Freedmen’s Bureau agents and military inspectors went about their duty in post-emancipation Kentucky, they frequently mentioned the activities of “Judge Lynch” in their

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34 James H. Rice to R. E. Johnston, June 13, 1866, ULRLCS&CSCO, Entry 1186, BRFAL-KY.
informal reports. Like the term “Regulator,” white supremacists utilized this phrase as self-descriptive, particularly when posting handbills or sending threatening correspondence. For example, a rather creative band in Lebanon, Marion County shoved a “Copy of Judge Lynchs Docket” under the door of J. M. Fidler, a Unionist and correspondent of the Louisville Daily Journal. The author of the docket described a hanging conducted by Regulators “on the Third fork of Lick Creek Washington County Ky. on the night of Nov. 10th 1866.” The victim, accused by the “court” of “the high crimes of Robbery, Violation of Ladies, horse thieving, etc.” The “jury” concluded “from the evidence” that the accused was “guilty of the crimes charged in the indictment on file in Judge Lynch’s Court.” In short order, Jack Jennings was mounted on a horse, a noose placed around his neck, and the horse being driven from under him, hanged from the limb of a sycamore tree. Later that month, the same “court” executed Clem Crowder, Bill Goode, and Tom Stephens near Lebanon after breaking them out of the town jail. In this instance, the Regulators clearly noted that they were taking this action due to the failure of the legitimate court, with Judge Newman on the bench, to serve justice on the accused. A few nights later, they lynched Jack Patterson of Boyle County. Additionally, “Judge Lynch” instructed that J. R. King, commander of the local garrison, correspondent Fidler, “and all other Newspaper Men, and all others be notified that they must desist from calling My Court a Mob.” In a final proclamation, “Judge Lynch” issued a general warning to all “Murderers, Violators of Ladies, Robbers, and Horse Thieves” that “we [will] come to you as you have often come to us in the night, and terrible is our coming. Vengeance is ours.”

Given that this threat was aimed directly at the local representative of the ongoing federal military presence in Kentucky, as well as a newspaper correspondent with known Unionist

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35 J. R. King to W. F. Drum, December 14, 1866, LRDKY, Entry 2173, USACC, RG 393.
leanings, this remarkably well-written “docket” and the very real murders it documents must have been the work of an elite member of one of the bands of Regulators terrorizing Unionists in the southern Bluegrass. According to historian Christopher Waldrep, perpetrators of racial violence gladly identified themselves as “Judge Lynch” because this title had attained an air of legitimacy in the late antebellum period. Certainly the proslavery citizens’ committees that squared off against abolitionists in the Bluegrass Region deemed themselves legitimate representatives of their community’s majority opinion, and so in the post-war period bands of white supremacists, whether or not they were the same individuals that had served on those committees of night riders, appealed to that tradition as justification for their current actions. Thus they chafed at the accusations of their enemies that they were a “mob” and not a legitimate group of citizens acting in the best interests of their community. On the other hand, Freedmen’s Bureau official reports utilized language carefully selected by Republicans at the national level, typically referring to the acts of Regulators, members of the Ku Klux Klan, and other violent white supremacists as “outrages” to undermine their legitimacy, particularly when it came to the opinions of lawmakers in Washington. Efforts of the Freedmen’s Bureau and other opponents of violent white supremacists to challenge their legitimacy would bear fruit as the Senate launched an investigation into Klan activities, an inquiry that eventually included Kentucky.36

At Camp Nelson, the ongoing efforts of freed people and missionaries to establish and maintain a free black community and school drew the ire of former slaveholders and white supremacists, as well as repeated attempts on the part of the Freedmen’s Bureau to break it up. At war’s end, refugees had refused to leave the camp, despite the army’s intent to dismantle it in its entirety. The Freedmen’s Bureau also had a policy of breaking up all such military refugee

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camps, and so in October 1865 Clinton Fisk had assigned R. E. Farwell to the camp, the only federal refugee center still open in Fisk’s district of Tennessee and Kentucky. Missionaries conducted some freed people, particularly women and children, north across the Ohio to new homes. By early 1866, the camp was being dismantled, literally around those who remained, as the Bureau cut back on rations in a last-ditch effort to dissuade the last of the refugees from staying. Around the camp, a scattered community began to emerge, centered on the school run by Abisha Scofield, with his son, daughter, and John G. Fee’s son, Howard. In 1868, Fee would purchase much of the land on which the camp sat for the purpose of building a more organized settlement, but in the meantime, the free black community became a focal point for Regulator attacks as well as ongoing Bureau efforts to disburse such settlements.\(^{37}\)

In January 1866, Colonel Charles G. Bartlett reported to his superiors in the Military Department of Kentucky that numerous outrages were being committed against freed people in the vicinity of the camp. He noted:

> almost daily cases have been brought to my notice since my arrival here, some two months since, in which the former owners of the wives and children of the men who have been soldiers, refuse to give them up upon the application of the husband and father for them and threaten him with violence and death if he attempts to go for them. In other cases former owners have refused to pay the freedmen for services rendered.

Bartlett further reported that a former sergeant of the 124th United States Colored Infantry had been shot at a ferry near Richmond, and that the child of a soldier in the 119th USCI had

apparently been abducted by a man from Midway, Woodford County, who reputedly then fled to Arkansas before civil authorities could apprehend him.\(^{38}\)

In May William H. Merrell, Assistant Inspector General for Kentucky, attempted to discredit Abisha Scofield in a report filed to Fisk by way of Levi Burnett. He reported that a third of the women remaining in the vicinity of Nelson were prostitutes, and that they had no other means of support. As to claims by Scofield that he was encouraging freed people to plant crops and become more self-sufficient, Merrell stated that in fact the missionary had sold seed donated to him by a missionary organization rather than distributing it among the freed people. He also criticized housing arrangements and the general health of the Camp Nelson population. He concluded that it would be in the best interests of all in the area if Scofield were removed and the settlement completely broken up: “Prostitution--disease, and suffering must inevitably result to a still grater extent, if the people are permitted to remain there--subject to no sanitary measures--no authority or restraint only such as Mr. Scofield exercises.”\(^{39}\) Merrell and others in the Bureau seemingly did not believe that freed people were capable of ordering their own communities, given time and absence of almost daily interference from white supremacists.

In this case, as in numerous others in the first two years of Reconstruction, the desires of freed people for autonomy many times were thwarted not only by violent resistance on the part of local white supremacists, but also by the paternalistic practices and racial prejudices of many military commanders and Freedmen’s Bureau officials, the vast majority of whom were themselves military men. Wed to the notion that former slaves could more quickly and peacefully be integrated into a free labor system by signing long-term contracts where labor was

\(^{38}\) Charles G. Bartlett to J. S. Grier, January 16, 1866, LRDKY, Entry 2173, USACC, RG 393.

\(^{39}\) William H. Merrell to Levi Burnett, May 4, 1866, Letters Received, Assistant Commissioner’s Office, Entry 1068, BRFAL-KY.
most needed, these men encouraged and cajoled freed people to go to work as wage laborers, in many cases for the very persons and families who had owned them as slaves. Though initially Commissioner Howard tried to provide an alternative for freedmen by encouraging land redistribution, at President Johnson’s insistence the Bureau became responsible for restoring plantations and other farms to their prewar owners in most cases, with Bureau agents overseeing and aiding negotiation of labor contracts, the terms of which, according to myriad complaints, often were not favorable to the employees. Thus the Bureau would not oversee what a great many freed people had hoped for: parceling out of abandoned land and the opportunity to start over as independent subsistence farmers, a turn of events that proved highly unsatisfactory to most freed people as well as some Bureau agents.40

In Kentucky, both the military and the Bureau worked to relocate refugees and vagrants from former military camps and urban centers, encouraging them to go back to work on farms where their labor admittedly was sorely needed.41 By autumn, the free black settlement at Camp Nelson, along with the slandered Abisha Scofield and his family, stood at odds with the Freedmen’s Bureau, which did not have the resources to defend it or him against Regulators. Freedmen organized a militia and attempted to guard both their own dwellings and the house occupied by Scofield. Regulators had made frequent raids on the community throughout the summer of 1866, and so an armed watch definitely was in order. While the pickets manned their posts, Regulators did not attack. But all of the pickets had to work during the day, thus making

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an around-the-clock defense difficult to maintain. As soon as the freedmen relaxed their vigilance, the Regulators returned in force.\textsuperscript{42}

In the first hour of November 20, 1866, a band of twenty or more Regulators attacked Camp Nelson and captured Scofield and his son, though his daughter managed to hide from them. The gang threatened the missionaries with flogging and worse but let them go unharmed after the father promised to leave the county. Even though the Scofields avoided physical abuse, they lost “every thing of any value” at the hands of their abductors. The band of Regulators then opened fire with muskets on a house occupied by two freedmen. One of the men apparently “made his escape,” but John Burnside stayed behind and returned fire, defending his home as best he could against overwhelming odds. Eventually his attackers outflanked and captured him, beat him senseless, and left him lying in the road, presumably to die from his injuries. John Burnside survived, but he could not provide sufficient testimony for the Freedmen’s Bureau to identify and prosecute his disguised attackers. Bureau agents deemed the testimony of other freed people too “wild and conflicting” to be reliable. The local agent, J. G. Nain of Nicholasville, stated frankly that anything short of a permanent garrison of troops would likely prove ineffectual against the Regulators. Ironically, after the Scofields had been forced to leave the community, William H. Merrell filed a report in which he spoke only praise for the work the missionaries had done and planned to do, if not for the actions of Regulators. He then opined that Regulators in the area had targeted Scofield’s school because it had white teachers.\textsuperscript{43}

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\textsuperscript{43} J. G. Nain to James H. Rice, November 22, 1866, ULRLCS&CSCO, Entry 1186, BRFAL-KY; Lucas, \textit{History of Blacks in Kentucky, Vol. 1}, 193-94, 240-41; William H. Merrell to John Ely, December 20, 1866, LRACO, Entry 1068, BRFAL-KY.
\end{flushright}
The autumn raids on the free black community at Camp Nelson clearly indicate that some bands of Regulators had agendas other than simply driving freed people out of Kentucky. Scofield’s school was the primary target of this raid, not the free black community surrounding it. Newly established schools for freed people came under attack throughout the Bluegrass in late 1866 and early 1867, particularly those taught by white teachers. For example, Regulators in Fleming County “posted up a notice on the School house door,” threatening the schoolteacher with death if the school remained open. One reason for these attacks lay in the fact that throughout 1866 Bluegrass farmers had again suffered from want of field hands. In addition to substantive war-related dislocations, some Regulators had driven numerous freed people from rural areas. Many of those who remained hesitated to “contract by the year,” preferring one-month contracts that allowed greater mobility. As frustration mounted among farmers who had previously relied upon slave labor, some of them vented their wrath on so called “Negro Schools,” arguing that educated freed people made poor field hands. Additionally, white supremacists feared that schools run by the Scofields and other missionaries taught racial equality in addition to reading, writing, and arithmetic, and that they refused to tolerate.44

Abuse of free black families at the hands of white residents of the Bluegrass surely reflects the bitterness many white Kentuckians felt toward the federal government regarding the wartime destruction of slavery and subsequent struggle over the meaning of freedom. Even in death, the bodies of Kentucky freed people became contested political terrain. In the summer and fall of 1865, Louisville leaders had grown increasingly outraged at John M. Palmer, to whom

they had written asking for federal assistance in relieving them of the burden refugees were placing on their local government. In response, Palmer had insisted that the city bear an even greater burden by taking financial responsibility for burying “all the dead Freedmen of the Refugee & Freedmen’s home in this city who may die within the corporate limits of said city.”

In the first years after emancipation, many well-to-do Kentuckians chose to ignore the refugee crisis in their own backstreets and alleyways, joining instead in relief efforts for devastated residents of the former Confederacy. On December 27, 1866, the Frankfort Kentucky Yeoman ran the following headline: “Concert for the Relief of the Suffering Poor of the South.” On Friday evening at the Capital Hotel, “the ladies of the city, assisted by the amateur musicians, generally,” would “give a concert the proceeds of which are to be applied to the relief of the destitution in the Southern States.” The editor went on to make an impassioned appeal “directly to the nobler impulses of our nature” for Kentuckians to come to the aid of “that country, which once did ‘blossom as the rose.’” This bit of rhetoric additionally demonstrates the dominant Victorian ideal of womanhood, as represented both by “the ladies of the city” and the now deflowered, devastated South. Such rhetoric masks the irony that, even as the appeal was issued to come to the aid of Kentucky’s southern sisters, thus reuniting and healing the national family, the real devastation, abuse, rape, and murder suffered by those trying to establish their own identities as free black families in the Commonwealth continued apace.

The editor further noted that citizens of Frankfort should put aside their feelings regarding both the cause of the war and whether or not it should have been fought. In millennial language common to the mid-nineteenth century, he warned his readers that “no man who hopes,

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45 Committee of the General Council of Louisville to John M. Palmer, May 9 and September 28, 1865, John M. Palmer Letters, FHS.
46 Frankfort Kentucky Yeoman, December 27, 1866; Anne C. Rose, Victorian America and the Civil War (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 189-193.
at the last time, to hear it said to him, ‘in as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me,’ can turn a deaf ear.”47 One presumes that as he quoted poetically from the King James Version of the Bible, he did not consider any persons of color his “brethren.” Freed people in Frankfort, as well as those huddled in makeshift shelters in every other urban center of the Bluegrass, were suffering in misery as another cold winter set in. Besieged by hunger, disease, and exposure, numerous of these individuals languished and died with little or no hope of aid in the form of food, fuel, or additional clothing, let alone medical care. Their best chance for relief came from the embattled Freedman’s Bureau or oftentimes equally embattled black churches and relief organizations. Substantive help also arrived from out of state, most often in the form of aid and assistance supplied by northern relief organizations. Still, there were never enough jobs to be had, enough clothes, food, fuel, medicine, and shelter to hand out or provide. Hundreds upon hundreds of former slaves died in Kentucky’s urban centers from want, and, one must note, passive racial violence in the form of malicious neglect on the part of white residents of the Commonwealth.48

47 Frankfort Kentucky Yeoman, December 27, 1866.
Chapter Five

“Conduct...Inexcusable and Unjustifiable”:

Free Black Women, their Children, and the Limits of Emancipation

Coinciding with the Regulator-imposed reign of terror in the countryside, a contest took place over the status of freedwomen and children living in urban settings and white households, as well as those living in black communities. The stories of these women and children bring to light the challenges they faced in the Bluegrass Region as they sought to make the transition from slavery to freedom. Numerous freedwomen complained of the apprenticeship system in Kentucky, which not only separated mothers from children but also kept many children in quasi-slavery for years after emancipation. An additional struggle, particularly noticeable in white middle-class households and between white and black members of the working class on the streets of urban centers, occurred concerning the limits of emancipation.

The case of a “colored girl” named Flora Ewing is illustrative. In mid-1866 she filed a complaint with the Louisville Sub-district, claiming to have been the victim of assault and battery inflicted by the husband of the white woman for whom she worked. According to Ewing, the events leading up to this assault began when on a Monday morning she asked her employer, Mrs. Young, “for two dollars which she owed me for working for her.” The woman told her that she had no money, and so Ewing went out into the yard to ask Mr. Young for her pay. He allegedly accosted her, demanding to know “what was that I was saying to his wife.” Ewing told him that she was owed two dollars, and as she knew for a fact that Mr. Young had just sold two cows, surely he could pay her. At that point, Young picked up a stick, grabbed Ewing by the neck, and hit her “four times over the head.” After he released her, she went home and laid
down, as her “head [had by that time] commenced to acheing.” Though it was still only
morning, Flora fell sound asleep, not waking up until mid-afternoon, at which time she got up
and went to sit in the doorway of her family’s home. At that point, Mr. Young came up, carrying
“a broom stick which he was using as a cane,” and, upon finding Ewing, struck her over the head
with it, despite the fact that Mrs. Ewing was trying to stand between him and her daughter. This
blow inflicted injury such that Flora could not get out of bed until the following Friday.¹

With affidavits from both Flora Ewing and her father, John Ewing, Bureau agents
conducted an investigation of Dorsey Young of Oldham County. This type of assault and
battery, although “of a serious nature,” did not constitute a sufficiently serious offense for formal
prosecution. Black plaintiffs had limited legal recourse in Kentucky, a state in which black
victims could not testify against white assailants in local or state courts. Initially the Freedmen’s
Bureau intervened by instituting a system of fines whereby to punish white perpetrators of
assault and battery that did not result in long-term or fatal injuries to the victims. After a brief
investigation, the Bureau found Dorsey Young guilty of “conduct...inexcusable and
unjustifiable,” and fined him twenty dollars for the expenses incurred by the federal government
in their investigation, as well as five dollars damages owed to Flora Ewing, along with payment
of any “bills as may have been made for medicines and medical attendance.”²

The end of slavery in Kentucky came hard not only to white men, but also to white
women. Betty Howard, for example, lamented in her diary that she and her children now were
forced to perform daily work, such as milking and meal preparation “in the absence of a servant

¹ Affidavit of Flora Ewing, June 5, 1866, enclosed in William P. Hogarty to C. H. Frederick, July
5, 1866, Letters Received, Louisville Superintendent and Subassistant Commissioner’s Office
(hereinafter cited as LRLS&SCO), Entry 1208, Kentucky District, Bureau of Refugees,
Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105 (hereinafter cited as BRFAL-KY)
(National Archives, Washington, D.C.).
² William P. Hogarty to C. H. Frederick, July 5, 1866, LRLS&SCO, Entry 1208, BRFAL-KY.
to do it.” She was “resolved” to pay a “servant” to take on these chores.³ Women like Mrs. Howard quickly moved to hire freedwomen or girls to live in their houses and tend to such unpleasant but necessary chores. In antebellum Kentucky, many white families had hired enslaved women to do these tasks, so the idea of paying wages was not new to them. Rather, the newness came from having to negotiate terms directly with black women, not with the white slaveholders who previously had hired them out.⁴ As part of this ongoing negotiation, black women now demanded treatment as free, independent wage laborers. On the other hand, white women and men demanded daily displays of deference from black women and men, and frequently treated them as if slavery had never been abolished. Young black women, really children in many cases, complained of beatings administered by their employers, who all too often were their former masters, for the slightest hint of insolence or even legitimate complaint. 

Hamstrung by state law and ongoing resistance to federal intervention, the Freedmen’s Bureau sought to mediate in these cases, though, as was the case with the negotiation of labor contracts for field hands and tenant farmers, they often took action that diverged somewhat from the hopes and wishes of their free black clients. As historian Herbert G. Gutman argued, “Neither the Civil War nor the Thirteenth Amendment emancipated northern whites from ideological currents that assigned inferior status to nineteenth-century blacks, women, and working-class men.”⁵

³ Betty Howard Diary, 1865-1866, [Filson Historical Society, Louisville (hereinafter cited as FHS)].
Taken all together, the records compiled by the Freedmen’s Bureau in the Bluegrass indicate that white assailants who victimized freed people had little to fear from either the Bureau or local and state authorities. As noted by numerous Bureau agents, county judges often failed to prosecute white men accused of racial violence. State officials challenged the Freedmen’s Bureau’s attempt to establish military-style courts, arguing that the Kentucky court system remained fully functional and the Bureau therefore had no authority to judge Kentuckians. Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1866 over President Johnson’s veto in order to provide some legal redress for wronged freedpersons, and in mid-1866 the Bureau began exercising jurisdiction in cases involving violations of the civil rights of black Kentuckians.6

Still, the Freedmen’s Bureau operated most effectively when it worked in close conjunction with armies of occupation or at least with sufficient troops at its disposal to protect its agents and their clients. Bluegrass Bureau agents had neither of these resources to aid them. Kentucky, which avoided formal Reconstruction in spite of its open defiance of federal laws and authorities, had a relatively small number of federal troops remaining in the state by 1866. Some Kentucky regiments of the USCT had been shipped south to guard the border with Mexico, while others were mustered out piecemeal. Returning black soldiers were systematically disarmed in accordance with state law. Home Guard units had been ordered disbanded. These actions left both Department of Kentucky officers and Bureau agents shorthanded with little hope of reinforcements at a time when they were sorely needed, even though both groups worked very closely with one another. Indeed, at times the two seemed to be one and the same, owing no doubt to the extreme shortage of manpower. Despite extraordinary efforts on the part of

numerous individuals, both Bureau agents and military authorities lacked the necessary means to intercede in the face of widespread resistance to emancipation. In many ways, federal policy regarding troop deployment in the Commonwealth opened the door for a post-war spree of racial violence as intense in some communities as that in any of the former states of the Confederacy.7

As historian Marion B. Lucas has noted, “white hostility to federal actions during the war was quickly transferred to Freedmen’s Bureau officials and the social revolution they sought to achieve.”8 To counter this terror campaign, Major General Fisk recruited Unionists either to work for the Bureau or at least to support it in its efforts to intervene on behalf of the Commonwealth’s former slaves. Fisk noted that, when at all possible, he appointed citizens of Kentucky to serve as Freedmen’s Bureau agents “upon the recommendation of the best men I could consult.” Thus the men most responsible for implementing Bureau policy in most cases were Kentuckians themselves and members of the communities in which they operated.9

William Cassius Goodloe, nephew of the irascible Cassius M. Clay, summarized eloquently what Bureau agents in the Bluegrass were up against on a daily basis. After taking charge of Bureau operations in Boyle, Lincoln, and Mercer counties, he concluded:

The Country is infested with Guerrilla bands and the outrages most generally are committed on Colored persons who are precluded from testimony against them. I am powerless to accomplish anything without Soldiers....The people are generally well enough disposed so far as taking a proper view of the labor question is concerned, but are misled by politicians and seem to think the object of the establishment of the Bureau in Kentucky was to oppress them....I found a great deal of vagrancy here but by the aid of many Loyal Citizens and the

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9 Clinton B. Fisk to O. O. Howard, February 14, 1866, reel 21, Registers and Letters Received by the Commissioner of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872, National Archives Microfilm Publication M752 (hereinafter cited as R&LRC, BRFAL, [M752]).
efforts of the leaders of the Colored population have to a great extent caused it to disappear....You are quite aware that I have had to grope my way in the dark, the manual promised will be hailed as an Angel of light.\textsuperscript{10}

Agents such as Goodloe quickly found that, while the majority of the white population seemed to understand, if not enthusiastically embrace, the reality that slavery had ended and a new free labor system would have to replace it, a vocal, violent minority nonetheless proved tremendously influential in thwarting the efforts of Bureau agents, missionaries, and freed people themselves. For their part, Bureau agents attempted to impose white middle class notions of marriage, family, and work on former slaves, while in many cases failing to recognize their own racist preconceptions. In the Bluegrass, this policy led to frustration, particularly among freedwomen who not only bore the brunt of racial violence but also the separation of children from mothers by means of an apprenticeship system that frequently ignored the wishes of the mother or child and placed black children in the service and care of former owners.

Kentucky, which along with Delaware refused to end slavery on its own, continued to defy emancipation even as the Thirteenth Amendment became law. In particular, numerous slaveholders simply refused to release women and children to their parents or other family members. On December 26, 1865, E. D. Kennedy, the Bureau’s Louisville superintendent, wrote to Robert Carruthers, a Jefferson County farmer, demanding he “at once liberate “the daughter and two grandchildren of George Patton. The daughter, Harriet, was the wife of a soldier in the USCT, and so she and her children technically had been free since March. A few days later, he wrote to Mrs. Collins of the same county, stating that a complaint had been lodged against her concerning treatment of a black female child she had managed “to detain and misuse.” In early

January, Kennedy demanded that Walter Ayres of Woodford County liberate two freedwomen being held “against their will.”

Apprenticeship of black children, originally “a means of subordinating free black people in a slave society,” now appeared to be a reasonable practice by which to ease children through the transition from slave to free laborer. Indeed, masters promised to teach their apprentices a “trade, art, and business,” so that by the time they reached adulthood, they could compete in the free market economy. Even if the trade in question most often was farming, such skills, if properly taught, had value in a predominantly rural society. Kentucky had apprenticeship laws on the books governing the practice for white children, and in 1866 the state legislature took the first step toward adapting these laws to apply to all children. Legislators, however, did not perceive black apprentices as equal to white apprentices, and they accorded them little protection under state law. In particular, the policy of giving former owners top priority when assigning black children for apprenticeship led to much consternation on the part of the Freedmen’s Bureau and the Commonwealth’s black population. Additionally, masters of black apprentices could simply make a one-time payment to the child and absolve themselves of all responsibility for educating them. The most frequent complaints about this system came from black mothers whose children had been removed from their homes, sometimes without their consent, and apprenticed to their former owners. While some mothers who lost their children in this manner were in fact destitute, others were quite capable of caring for their own children. Among the reported abuses to apprentices were failure to teach a trade, which undermined the basic

justification for apprenticeship, and physical abuse, including not only frequent whippings but also battery resulting in serious injury to the apprentice.¹²

Hannah Neille’s son was apprenticed to Mrs. Olden of Louisville in the summer of 1866. In December, his mother took him home to care for him, as he was suffering from wounds inflicted when Mr. Olden beat him with a broomstick. After a few days, she took the boy back to the Olden house, only to have Mr. Olden tell her that he did not want him “because of being accused of beating the child.” Neille testified that she had bound the boy out for food and clothing, apparently being unable to support him herself. During the whole time he was with the Oldens, he only received a pair of worn pants that Mrs. Olden had cut off to fit him. Neille asked the Bureau to help her collect “a reasonable hire for the boy for the time he worked.” He had worked about eleven weeks, and Neille deemed a reasonable sum to be fifty cents a week. Likewise, Harriet Sutherland’s son, Alfred, had been severely whipped by his master, Augustus Ryan. Alfred “left him and came home” to live with his mother, who wrote the Bureau to ask what might be done to force Ryan to pay Alfred for the four weeks he had already worked.¹³

Many freedwomen tried to stand up for themselves and their children, as was the case with Lavina Newland, a freedwoman living with and working for a family in Henry County. She had an altercation with her employer, Shelton Scott, when an innocent game between her son and Scott’s daughter got too rough. According to Newland, she had taken the children with her to milk the cows. As she milked, the kids played. Her twelve-year-old son, Edward, was a good

¹³ Affidavit of Hannah Neille, December 24, 1866, Affidavit of Harriet Sutherland, June 28, 1867, both in Affidavits and Records Relating to Complaints, Louisville Superintendent and Subassistant Commissioner’s Office (hereinafter cited as ARRCLS&SCO), Entry 1218, BRFAL-KY.
bit older than Scott’s daughter, so perhaps he was helping watch the girl while his mother did her chores. In any event, the girl picked up a rock and threw it at Edward, hitting him but doing no harm. Her son, “in a playful mood threw a chip which hit the girl and she ran to the house crying and her father came out.” Shelton Scott then “picked up a stick and struck” Edward several times, apparently knocking him to the ground, where he placed his foot on the boy and continued to “beat him with the stick.”

At this point, Newland told her employer that “she thought he had whipped the boy enough,” to which he replied, “you black Bitch if you don’t mind I will give you as much.” Undaunted, she apparently told him to go ahead, at which point he picked up a rock and threw it, striking her in the head and “causing the blood to flow and run down her clothes to the ground.” Newland, though dazed, apparently threw the contents of her milk pail at Scott, who then beat her repeatedly with the stick. Newland vowed to take her three children and leave the farm, but when she started to do so Scott would not let Edward go. She took her two other children and left, later petitioning the Bureau to take action against Shelton Scott both for damages and the release of her son. After a brief investigation, the Bureau found that her injuries were insufficient and her actions toward Scott too provocative to merit any action. As to the fate of Edward, who apparently was not seriously injured, the Bureau discovered that he was legally bound to Shelton Scott as an apprentice, and so they chose not to press the matter further.

Mothers who worked as live-in servants and had their children with them faced a particularly difficult time. Their employers had tremendous leverage over every aspect of their daily lives, as evidenced by the testimony of Mary Ellen Gardner, who worked as a live-in

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14 Affidavit of Lavina Newland, September 3, 1867, enclosed in Isaac. S. Catlin to Sidney Burbank, September 4, 1867, LRLS&SCO, Entry 1208, BRFAL-KY.
15 Ibid.
domestic for Lucy Ann Magruder of Henry County. Mary Ellen had “hired herself to work for Mrs. Magruder for the feeding and clothing of herself and her children,” and she swore that she had “been faithful in her attention to her duties.” But she claimed that her employer always managed to find a way to keep her from going to church on Sundays, so that she had not been able to attend a meeting in over a year. In the summer of 1866, her employer left with her sons early in the morning, and so Gardner cut a deal with another woman to watch over the house for her, and she went to church. Unfortunately for her, Mrs. Magruder returned home before she did, and so was waiting for her. She told Gardner that her actions left no choice but to bind out her children as apprentices. When Gardner protested, Mr. Magruder told her to shut up, at one point calling her “a Damned yellow bitch.” Further, he “said to her you think you are free but I’ll show you whether you are or not,” at which point he went into the house and quickly returned, cowhide in hand. He proceeded to whip her mercilessly as if she were still a slave. In the end, Gardner fled with her children and contacted the Bureau for help.16

The Bureau could do little to intercede in even the worst cases involving apprentices. By September 1866, complaints were streaming into the Louisville Sub-district regarding the practice of apprenticing black children to their former owners, often “without notice to the mother or the consent of the [children].” Such practices were against newly revised Kentucky statutes regarding apprenticeship, which mandated that parents and children must be present in court when apprenticeships were assigned, with their consent required for the contract to be legal. In practice, individual county courts frequently acted in the best interests of the masters, not the apprentices. Once again federal authorities in Kentucky ran up against the powerful, independent county court system, in which county voters elected their own judges. As non-

16 Affidavit of Mary Ellen Gardner, August 30, 1866, ARRCLS&SCO, Entry 1218, BRFAL-KY.
voters, freedmen had little protection under the law at the local level. Freedwomen and children had even less. Louisville’s subassistant commissioner, C. H. Frederick, concluded, “It is a lamentable fact that in the face of all this law and authority complaints are made two or three times a week where judges of the county courts have permitted children to be bound without a single one of the legal requirements being complied with.” He further lamented, “No civil court of the state of higher jurisdiction than the county court will take cognizance of these cases and have these children so bound released.” Frederick’s superiors concluded that their only resort was to levy fines and, in the worst cases, attempt to prosecute in federal court, thus bypassing the Kentucky court system altogether under the new federal Civil Rights Act, aspects of which were aimed specifically at the Commonwealth’s defiant legislators and judges, not to mention its stubborn and abusive former slaveholders.17

Black apprentices sometimes were hired out, with their master claiming the wages they earned. This practice was a clear violation of state law as well as federal policy, and the Bureau typically moved to intercede in these cases. Yet former slaveholders and their allies in Kentucky, like their counterparts in the border state of Maryland, could be brazen in their defiance not only of the Freedmen’s Bureau but also of emancipation itself. Using apprenticeship, along with other tactics, as “revenge against former slaves for the fact of emancipation” and “punishment for disloyalty,” these men and women did not shy away from violence.18 C. J. True, Unionist editor and Bureau agent for Maysville, had a run-in with R. P. Henry of nearby Washington over a case involving the child of a soldier of the USCT. In

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18 Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground*, 140-142.
November 1866, True wrote to Mrs. Lucretia Clereny, asking her to pay Henry Coleman the sum of two hundred fifty dollars for money she had earned by hiring out his son after such time as the boy had been freed by the March 1865 act of Congress. R. P. Henry, writing back to “J. C. True of the Nigger Bureau,” on behalf of Mrs. Clereny, stated, “Her negroes were not freed, but stolen by a set of Yankee robbers.” Additionally, Henry invited True and a man named Campbell, another prominent Maysville Unionist, not only to sue, but also to “present that bill in person.” The implied threat of violence should True or anyone else attempt to serve such a notice was unmistakable.19

A slaveholder near Louisville proved equally offended, if less violently inclined, when ordered by the Bureau to pay for property he had destroyed that allegedly belonged to his former slave, Rachel Scott, who had fled from his farm in late 1865. In early 1866, Scott petitioned the Bureau to help her collect fair value for a chest and a chair she had left behind at the home of S. W. Raplee, her former master. Raplee replied that the chest and chair may have been worth a dollar fifty cents in firewood at most, and that furthermore, they belonged to him, not Scott. He alleged that any entitlement she may have had to the items had been forfeited when she ran away, as she was still his slave at the time, “according to the laws of Kentucky.” He went on to say that he had always been a law-abiding citizen and had, indeed, served in the Union army in the war. Bitterly summing up the sad state of affairs that now pitted him against the government he had fought to defend, Raplee concluded, “And for me to pay my property [his former slave]

for my property [the chest and chair he had provided for her use] I don’t think is right and I will not do it. I would rather rot in a military prison.”

While the case of Rachel Scott appeared to have been relatively minor, other cases involved serious threats to free black women and children. Emily Churchill testified that in March 1866 she had gone to the house of her former owner for the purpose of retrieving her two sons still held in bondage. Both were boys, one age ten, the other age 4 and blind. Churchill seems to have timed this liberation to coincide with the absence of her former owner, Harrison Arterburn, of Jefferson County. She successfully retrieved her sons, along with a chair, and started toward Louisville. Her luck ran out when a buggy containing Arterburn came down the road toward her. He hopped out and bade the driver go on without him, after which he accosted his former slave and accused her of stealing. When she told him that her only intent was to claim her children and her chair, he grew angry and pulled out a pocketknife, which he used to threaten the ten-year-old. The boy smartly fled from him, running away down the road toward Louisville, but then the white man vented his anger on Churchill and her four-year-old, hitting the woman in the head, knocking her down, and then hitting her blind son twice with his fist. Finally, according to Churchill, he “threatened to cut my throat.” At that point, “she begged him for her life and appealed to him in behalf of her children, her blind one particularly.” Having spent his anger, Arterburn responded favorably to her pleas, but then he had the audacity to ask her if she would consider returning to stay with him. She refused and proceeded back to the city with her sons “without further molestation.”

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20 S. W. Raplee to William P. Thomasson, February 3, 1866, ULRLS&SCO, Entry 1209, BRFAL-KY.
21 Affidavit of Emily Churchill, March 20, 1866, ARRCLS&SCO, Entry 1218, BRFAL-KY.
Women and girls working as domestic and farm help frequently reported that either they had not been paid or they had been beaten or, as in the case of Maria Jane Russell, both. Russell had agreed to work for a woman she simply called Miss Susan. The two had a disagreement over Russell’s pay, and so she found another home in which to work. When Russell went back to Miss Susan’s house to collect wages owed her, as well as her bed and trunk, she ran into trouble. A boarder with Miss Susan accosted her, accusing her of starting a trend that had led to another domestic servant leaving, as well. As Russell tried to explain, the male boarder “jumped up and commenced kicking her and she ran out of the house. The man followed her outside and shouted after her “if she came back there again he would cowhide her,” after which he called her “a dammed black bitch.” Chillingly illustrating the relative powerlessness of the Freedmen’s Bureau to intervene in such cases, the man further told Russell that he did not fear the government, for if he whipped her to death, he could afford to pay any paltry fine the Bureau would levy against him. Happily for Maria Jane Russell, a black male friend had already loaded up her bed and trunk, so at least she did not lose them, even if she never received the pay Miss Susan owed her.22

Susan Richards had an equally rough time with Martha Hughes of Jefferson County, who hired her and then drove her off after only a couple of days. When Richards returned to collect the fifty cents she felt Hughes owed her, the woman told her she did not deserve it, as she had not stayed for the entire week. Richards responded, “You drove me off and as soon as I got a place to go I left you.” At that point, Hughes called her nephew, Charles Hughes, to come remove Richards from the premises. The man picked up a big stick and savagely struck Richards in the head with it, though it took him two hands to do so. As she reeled from the first

22 Affidavits of Maria Jane Russell and John Allen, September 4, 1866, ARRCLS&SCO, Entry 1218, BRFAL-KY.
blow, he laid another vicious blow across her back. Richards “spit blood that day and the next,” and was sore for days after. After he struck her, Charles Hughes asked, “Why did you give your impudence to her?” Implicit in his statement is the notion that Richards had forgotten her “place” and thus had brought on the beating. Charles Hughes thus evidenced a clear belief that he, nor even his high-strung aunt, shared the blame for this incident. When he picked up that stick and laid into Richards, he was merely doing his part to re-establish what he no doubt deemed the proper social relationship between his aunt and her black hired help.

In some cases, white women did not ask men for help, but administered their own beatings. Suzzie Riney testified that her employer, a woman named Brown, had demanded she put on a clean dress in which to serve dinner. When Riney balked, Brown ordered her to leave the house. Again Riney balked, trying to smooth things over by serving dinner. In the midst of her efforts, Mrs. Brown punched her in the face. At that point, Brown’s sister got involved, holding Riney while the irate employer continued to hit and kick her. The sisters forced the servant outside, at which point Riney threatened to go to the police and Mrs. Brown threatened to hit her in the head with a hatchet. Riney finally agreed to seek employment elsewhere, but as she tried to pack her belongings, Mrs. Brown attacked her again, accusing her of stealing a sheet that had gone missing some weeks before. When Riney asked her if she wanted to search her trunk, Brown assaulted her with a shoe. In the end, the battered domestic servant went to the Freedmen’s Bureau and asked for their help.

Josaphine Beadford’s case was even more disturbing, in that she and her daughter were suffering various abuses simultaneously at the hands of different employers. She reported “that the man where I have been living for the last twelve months...will not pay me anything for my

23 Affidavit of Susan Richards, September 6, 1866, ARRCLS&SCO, Entry 1218, BRFAL-KY.
24 Affidavit of Suzzie Riney, August 17, 1867, ARRCLS&SCO, Entry 1218, BRFAL-KY.
work.” Beadford noted that she was “a smart healthy woman” living in the home of Collin Eggin of Taylorsville, Spencer County. She inquired as to whether “there is any protection by the government for us poor colored people,” including her “daughter hired to Eli Snider who has abused her very much.”25 In a similar case of abuse of a child, Jennie Addison, age twelve, testified that the wife of James C. Ford, who employed her and her mother, ordered a male employee to beat Jennie on several occasions. This was no mild switching, either, as the “man struck her 7 or 8 times with his fist saying that he was authorized by [Ford’s wife] to inflict the punishment.” When confronted by the Bureau, assailants frequently downplayed the severity of their assault, saying it was only a switching, such as one would give a child. Testimony from battered domestic servants strongly suggests much more serious abuse. The Bureau cautioned Ford to remember that “Negroes are no longer slaves and the law does not permit them to be beaten and abused in this manner either by the persons hiring them or by any person who they may also have employed,” and ordered him to appear before them to answer these charges.26

Nancy Johnson, a domestic servant for a doctor in Jefferson County, testified that, when she accidentally broke the spout on a teapot, her employer became enraged and beat her with a stick. She attempted to flee, taking her clothes with her, but about “one mile and a half from the house the Doct. overtook her and struck her several times with his fist and slapped [her] in the eye (all of which hurt her very much) and compelled her to return.” She did, but later that night she fled again, this time leaving the heavy bundle of clothing behind. She asked the Bureau to help her get her clothing from the doctor, as well as payment “for six days labor at $2 per week and such other relief as she may be entitled to.” For his part, the doctor denied doing more than

25 Josaphine Beadford to Freedmans Bureau, November 24, 1867, ULRLS&SCO, Entry 1209, BRFAL-KY.
26 C. H. Frederick to James C. Ford, July 3, 1866, ARRCLS&SCO, Entry 1218, BRFAL-KY.
shaking a stick at the woman to threaten her when she “interfered with his affairs.” He also denied that she had ever broken the teapot, and he claimed that she had carried with her when she fled more clothing than she had when she first started working in his house. In such cases, the Bureau frequently took no action, as they did not have what they deemed sufficient evidence in that they did not have third-party testimony.

Such was the result when Ellen Castleman, a freedwoman who was six months pregnant, contacted the Bureau regarding similar rough treatment on the part of her Louisville employer. She worked as a cook for Thomas Langdon, who accosted her in August 1866 with accusations that she had been spreading rumors about him. In particular, he accused her of telling other people that he was “staying with Sallie Lewis a colored girl also hired by him.” Castleman responded that “she had never said anything about him in any way.” Not believing his cook, Langdon began “cursing her and calling her bitch and other names.” When she tried to walk away from him, he followed her, repeating his accusations and then punching her “with his fist on the mouth loosening two of her front teeth.” She fled the house and later reported him to the Bureau. After a brief investigation in which they could locate no other witnesses, the Bureau dismissed her charges against Langdon.

Sadly, free black women and children sometimes suffered violence at the hands of black men, as well. For example, the hired hand that beat up Jennie Addison may well have been black. Further, Melinda Greathouse, a black woman from Louisville, testified that she had seen her neighbor, a black man named John Lisker, tie up and whip with a rope a twelve-year-old orphaned girl who lived with him and his wife, apparently as an apprentice. The commotion of

27 Affidavit of Nancy Johnson, March 25, 1867, affidavit of Doct. George A. Hoke, March 29, 1867, both in ARRCLS&SCO, Entry 1218, BRFAL-KY.
28 Affidavit of Ellen Castleman, August 1, 1866, ARRCLS&SCO, Entry 1218, BRFAL-KY.
the whipping drew the attention of several neighbors, who witnessed the end of it. Afterward, Lisker left the house, and some black neighbors tried to intervene on behalf of the girl, untying her and taking her across the street. Lisker’s wife later persuaded the neighbors to let her take the girl back home. Upon his return, she told her husband all about the neighbors, and he angrily called out threats to them, stating in particular “that he would cut Mrs. Willis throat if she meddled with his business.” Willis’s husband Jonathan took exception, and in the ensuing shouting match Lisker made clear his intention to “cut Mrs. Willis’s or any other Niggers throat that interfered with his business.” Apparently Lisker styled himself some sort of community regulator in this urban neighborhood, boasting to his black landlord that he and his friend “kept the peace” there. He further claimed that the whipping he applied to his “Nigger” had been “to keep her from stealing.”

As indicated by the above complaints, both white men and white women engaged in actions by which they attempted to deny black women and children the same status as white women and children. For its part, the Bureau based its policies on the assumption that white families who hired servants or contracted with apprentices “inculcated order and conservatism by teaching black children the value of work and the importance of staying in one’s ‘place’.” Thus it is possible to see how the Freedmen’s Bureau perceived apprenticeship and domestic servitude in white Victorian middle class households as having potential to affect a positive influence on former slaves. The Bureau proved reluctant to intervene in all but the most serious cases of abuse, even cooperating fully with the removal via apprenticeship of children from mothers they deemed unfit. In such a setting, where abuse of servants and apprentices was commonplace, it is all too easy to see where John Lisker got the notion that whipping his “Nigger” was an

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29 Affidavit of Melinda Greathouse, October 1, and affidavit of Reverend Willis L. Muir, October 3, 1866, ARRCLS&SCO, Entry 1218, BRFAL-KY.
acceptable form of maintaining discipline in his free black household. White Kentuckians, like
their peers in the former Confederate states, refused to give up the switch, the stick, and the
cowhide following emancipation, and they presented a model that Lisker and other freedmen
might choose to emulate. While the Bureau dutifully recorded affidavits, it did little more than
impose the occasional fine in its attempts to discourage such abuse. Further adding to the
potential for domestic violence, freedmen, most of whom had been born and raised in the brutal
world of slavery, could become violent themselves, asserting free black manhood by dominance
over and abuse of black women and children.\footnote{Randy Finley, \textit{From Slavery to Uncertain Freedom: The Freedmen’s Bureau in Arkansas, 1865-1869} (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1996), 33-38.}

Alongside of the potential for abuse in the home or workplace, black women struggled to
assert their rights on city streets. A resident of the Portland community on the northern edge of
Louisville who worked as a laundress for a steamboat, Hannah Jones drew the ire of a white man
when he staggered from a saloon and fell against her as she carried clothes back to the crew. He
spat upon her and the clean clothes, and as she moved away, he grabbed “a barroom chair” and
threw it at her, “striking her on the arm and side hurting her so much as to prevent her from
continuing her work on the boat.” She quickly located a policeman for whom she had worked
and asked him for help. He replied, “He could do nothing for her as the colored people had no
law here.” Discouraged and hurting, Jones started home, but the man who had hit her with the
chair followed her. She ducked into a neighbor’s house, but he forced his way in and assaulted
her, at one point kicking her “in the eye with his boot.” When two white men came to the door
to see what was going on, her assailant left, but he sent word back later that if she reported him
“to any body he would blow her head off.” A black schoolteacher in Portland who had visited
the badly beaten Jones noted “that there is a class of men in Portland who are very troublesome to the colored people there and the civil authorities cannot be got to do any thing to stop it.”

A similar incident happened to Jennie Bell and Mary Moore of Louisville. Bell apparently brushed up against a white man as she walked along a street one Sunday afternoon. He immediately cursed her and called her a “damned black bitch,” whereupon she replied that she was “no more of a bitch than he was.” A policeman named Marty, who was standing nearby, told Bell to go on home, “you Damned bitch or I will put you in the Watch house,” to which Bell again replied that she was “no more a Damned bitch than he.” At this point, the policeman took her off to jail. Over the next couple of days, Bell arranged to be released then complained to the Bureau about her treatment. In response, Marty and another policeman named Hipwell arrested her again, and this time took in Mary Moore, as well, apparently in an attempt to prevent them from talking anymore with the Freedmen’s Bureau. The women were fined ten dollars by a local magistrate, but they could not pay, and so they were ordered to the workhouse. At this point, the Bureau intervened, calling Marty and Hipwell before the Bureau court and ordering the Louisville police to pay Jenny Bell ten dollars and Mary Moore fifty dollars for wrongful arrest, noting that the arrest of Moore had been “without a parallel” as “she had done nothing, and no charge had been made against her.” Marty was fined ten dollars for his “vulgar language and contempt of Court,” when he “undertook to Bully the Court.” Because they refused in any way to cooperate with the Bureau, Marty and Hipwell were sent to the military prison to cool off. Within a few hours, however, General Palmer intervened and ordered their release.

31 Affidavits of Hannah Jones, August 13, and George Griffith, August 10, 1867, both enclosed in Isaac S. Catlin to Sidney Burbank, August 15, 1867, LRLS&SCO, Entry 1208, BRFAL-KY.
32 Case of Bell and Moore, col. vs. Marty and Hipwell, Policemen, for improper arrest, February 15, 1866, ARRCLS&SCO, Entry 1218, BRFAL-KY.
Many white men and women in Kentucky, including some Bureau agents, at base simply
did not believe in black equality, and so they continued to treat freedwomen as perpetual children
rather than the free wage laborers, wives, and mothers they were struggling to become. In so
doing, they came into conflict with these women, who were developing and acting upon clear
ideas about free black womanhood. Given the demands of establishing a life for themselves and
their children, black women sometimes made practical decisions at odds with the dominant
ideals of northern white society. For example, agents strongly encouraged monogamy, and many
black women gladly committed themselves to one man in marriage, only to find that their man
refused to make the same commitment. Thus some freedwomen had to make practical choices,
living single lives as female heads of households, and sometimes even resorting to prostitution to
provide for their families. Such actions, needless to say, went against Bureau expectations.
Further, observing such behavior, “many white northerners” concluded “that freed people were
incapable of understanding or accepting the responsibilities that came with marriage.” Such a
misrepresentation would not have been quite so insidious, had not “white northerners and
southerners alike used marriage as a barometer for [freedpeople’s] fitness for freedom.”

When freedwomen, faced with little alternative, turned to sex work for survival, the
Bureau intervened with a heavy hand. Actively participating in Victorian America’s campaign
against prostitution, agents tried to break up brothels in which freedwomen worked, and they
readily removed children from mothers who could demonstrate no viable means of support other
than sex work. Still, Bureau agents were confronted with the reality that some white men sought
out black women for their sexual enjoyment, as well as for displays of white power and male
dominance, sexual or otherwise. Mutually agreed-upon interracial relationships, as well as intra-

33 Laura F. Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction*
racial extramarital sexual relationships, violated Bureau ideals regarding the shaping of black families according to white perceptions and norms, and so were discouraged. And yet the Bureau appears to have been no more effective at protecting black women from unwanted sexual advances and sexual assault than it was at attempting to regulate consensual sexual behavior. One reason for this was that Bureau agents “unquestioningly accepted racial and sexual stereotypes from their past,” and thus did not take seriously many reports of sexual assault. Additionally, as historian Herbert Gutman argues, not all federal soldiers and officers were “model Victorian gentlemen,” and certainly many white male civilians failed to live up to that ideal.34

Freedwomen frequently found themselves in danger of being sexually assaulted or imposed upon in an uneven power relationship with a white man or men. D.F. Bligh testified on May 24 that three white men, Thomas Vickers, John Rhodes, and John Stewart, had robbed Stephen Scott and “four other negroes.” After robbing the men, the small band of assailants strung one of them up “until he was nearly dead.” The white men then assaulted and attempted to rape a black woman who was present. Ironically, these men were arrested in connection with their involvement in this and other robberies, not because of this attempted rape.35 Black women who tried to speak out against unwanted sexual advances frequently stood accused of lying. Emma Gwinn, a domestic servant living in the home of Mrs. James Prather, reported that Prather’s son made unsolicited sexual advances toward her one night as she lay in bed. She got up and left him there, and on the advice of another servant, went straight to his mother to tell her what had happened. The next morning the young Prather accosted her, beating her with a poker

34 Finley, From Slavery to Uncertain Freedom, 38-44; Gutman, Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 385-389.
35 Affidavit of D.F. Bligh, May 24, 1866, LRLS&SCO, Entry 1208, BRFAL-KY.
as he yelled, “Damn you you went and told my mother a Damned lie on me and if you don’t go out of the yard I will shoot you.” She fled immediately and contacted the Bureau, requesting them to force the man to answer for his actions.36

While most of these cases do not represent the same type of social and political violence in which Regulators engaged, they do reflect the extreme hostility many Kentuckians, even some who fought for the Union, held toward both freed people and the Freedmen’s Bureau. In such an environment, where women and children daily experienced abuse at the hands of their employers and other white Kentuckians, the actions of Regulators could be rationalized and, to a degree, justified. Within such a political framework, men and women who justified whipping and otherwise abusing black women and children, either in a fit of anger or as a regular practice to maintain discipline over their laborers, could not overly criticize social and racial violence committed by bands of night riders that claimed to be operating in the best interests of their community. And, as Gutman noted, “Ex-slave husbands and fathers found it difficult to protect their wives and daughters from the conventional sexual insult and even abuse that remained after...emancipation.” Quite simply, white Kentuckians in general and white urban-dwellers in particular refused to treat freedwomen as deserving of the same basic courtesies and the same level of respect and protection accorded to white women both in public and private settings. As a result, free black women frequently fell victim not only to white men who dealt them insults and beatings, but also to perpetrators of rape.37

White supremacists frequently reserved their worst violence for the families of soldiers of the USCT. In December 1865, the wife of a black soldier filed a complaint that a white man named Brown had assaulted her. Another resident of Louisville, Mary Hilton, filed a similar

36 Affidavit of Emma Gwinn, July 5, 1867, ARRCLS&SCO, Entry 1218, BRFAL-KY.
37 Gutman, Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 396-402.
complaint, accusing James McFaron of assaulting her “in a brutal manner.”

Clinton Fisk reported that throughout the Commonwealth white men had beaten, stabbed, and raped a number of black women and girls in recent months, often driving them from their homes, which the assailants typically left in ruins or ashes. For example, in Nicholas County, a white man raped a twelve-year-old black girl by the side of a public road, and three white men burst into the home of an older black couple and made the husband watch as they raped his wife. A man broke into the home of one of his former slaves in Jessamine County who was the wife of a soldier in the USCT, hit her with a chair, then tied her up and beat her between the legs with a leather strap.

Mason Thomison, a freedman, and his family were already bedded down for a late winter’s night in Owen County, Kentucky, when all hell broke loose outside their home. About thirty white men, some of whom Thomison would later identify, rode up and bade him come out of his house. They forced him to climb up on his own roof, rip up the shingles, and knock down the chimney. On the ground, one of the night riders knocked out Mason’s son, a veteran of the Union Army, and then three of them took turns raping Mason’s wife. This was not the first time night riders had come calling at the Thomison residence. Earlier, a smaller group “of the same men” had come looking for his son, whom they called “that Scott County Nigger.” The men had relieved Mason of a pistol, a couple of wool government-issue blankets, and a new shirt. He had reported this first outrage to the military authorities, but, according to his later affidavit, General Palmer “said he could do nothing for me then.”

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38 E. D. Kennedy to Charles A. Gould, December 12, 1865, and E. D. Kennedy to James McFaron, December 18, 1865, both in PCLSLS&SCO, Entry 1201, BRFAL-KY
39 Clinton B. Fisk to O. O. Howard, March 12, 1866, reel 28, R&LRC, BRFAL, M752
40 Mason Thomison, Affidavit, taken by Captain J. W. Parker, 119th Regt., USCT, March 17, 1866, Unregistered Letters Received, Lexington Chief Superintendent and Chief Subassistant Commissioner’s Office (hereinafter cited as ULRLCS&CSCO), Entry 1186, BRFAL-KY.
As indicated by the language of Marion County’s “Judge Lynch,” concepts of manhood and womanhood must figure prominently in any attempt to understand the motivations and actions of Regulators, particularly their campaign against free black households. Many white residents of the Bluegrass constructed their identity in relation to a rigid social order in which race, class, and gender served as foundations for a complex hierarchy. As they had in the antebellum period, in post-war Kentucky white men viewed themselves as the dominant group. They defined their masculinity in part by how well they could “protect” white women from perceived threats. By accusing their victims of “violation of Ladies,” for example, Regulators portrayed themselves as defenders of white womanhood, and thus upholders of community norms, not politically motivated assassins. After the demise of slavery, many white men in the Bluegrass Region saw it as their duty to defend white women against free black men. In March 1866, a group of citizens in Paris, county seat of Bourbon, lynched two black men alleged to have raped and murdered two white girls. In May 1866, a Franklin County mob lynched a black adolescent accused of raping a white girl. In the minds of white men, such lynchings sent a clear message that white women and girls were strictly off limits to black men. By tying their actions to this widely held notion, Regulators tried in yet one more way to establish their legitimacy.41

By the same token, Regulators and other white supremacists hoped to demonstrate black inferiority, and thus the need for continued subordination, in multiple ways. They frequently challenged the masculinity of black men, sometimes physically emasculating them. In the case of black women, the lesson taught by white men was equally clear: they were not deserving of the same protection as white women. In post-emancipation Kentucky white men sexually assaulted black women with little fear of reprisal, sometimes raping them while forcing their

husbands or kinsmen helplessly to watch. In the spring of 1866, Robert Guthrie testified that his house was looted and furniture destroyed by a dozen men reputedly looking for weapons. Guthrie recognized the leader as a Mr. Smith, son of Mrs. Smith of La Grange, in Oldham County. After ransacking his house, the band went to Gene Thomas’s house and did the same. While there, they raped Thomas’s daughter, as well as his wife’s pregnant niece. The sexual assault on these two freedwomen did not stop “until nearly the whole crowd one after another ravished them.”

Numerous sexual assaults likely were crimes of opportunity committed by rapists against women with virtually no legal protection. Still, the timing and details of certain assaults indicate other motives, including the re-establishment of white superiority in post-emancipation Kentucky. Raping the mother, wife, or daughter of a black male head of the house, a minister, or a soldier who served in the USCT, particularly while forcing him to watch, sent a clear message to him that in reality he was far less than a man, and that the women being raped were not ladies worthy of protection. Thus some rapists in Kentucky, as historian Hannah Rosen has argued was the case for white rapists in Memphis, “turned to black women’s gender and sexuality as a site for reenacting and reproducing racial inequality and subordination.” Rapists attempted to demonstrate to their victims that they did not possess feminine virtue, as nineteenth-century Victorians in America understood the term. Further, rapists sent an unmistakable message to newly emancipated black men that they could not protect their women from the advances of white men any more effectively now than when they were enslaved. On the other hand, by swearing out affidavits and making complaint to Bureau agents, freed people politicized black

42 Clinton B. Fisk to O. O. Howard, June 8, 1866, reel 33, R&LRC, BRFAL, M752.
43 Affidavits of Robert Guthrie and Richard Thomas, March 30, 1866, ULRLS&SCO, Entry 1209, BRFAL-KY.
women’s bodies in an effort to achieve the full measure of protection due them under federal civil rights laws.44

Indeed, if free black women remained vulnerable to rape on the part of white perpetrators, they, unlike enslaved women, had the knowledge that what had been done to them now constituted a crime, at least in the eyes of some Freedmen’s Bureau agents, who dutifully recorded the affidavits of black witnesses and victims. Still, the Bureau had very limited resources and, at times, limited will to act, other than to levy fines against perpetrators of racial violence. Their weakness and vulnerability would be clearly illustrated in 1867, as they found themselves not only a most unwanted presence in the Commonwealth, but also under direct attack from bands of white supremacists which had them outnumbered and outgunned.

In post-emancipation Kentucky, white supremacists not only acted with impunity, they also sought to legitimate their actions in the eyes of their communities. Some of them proved astonishingly successful in accomplishing this end, as is illustrated by analysis of the assassination of Unionist James H. Bridgewater, who was shot to death on the evening of July 18, 1867, while playing checkers in the bar room of the Dodd House in Stanford, Lincoln County. Area Regulators viewed Bridgewater as representative of ongoing federal interference in the Commonwealth and thus a hindrance to their local agenda. These men, the Kentucky equivalent of Tennessee’s Ku Klux Klan, used terror tactics both to stymie political competition for the building blocks of state power, including the offices of sheriff and magistrate, and to impose a white supremacist social order after the formal abolition of slavery. Like-minded partisan editors sought to legitimize both the actions of these night riders and of state and local elected officials by arguing that ‘outlaws’ such as Bridgewater had to die so that law and order might be restored, while assuring readers that such things did not happen to “good citizens.”

The success of such editorial efforts in laying the foundation for a usable memory of Regulator violence may be seen in a series of articles written in 1996 by David Gambrel, staff writer for the Kentucky Advocate (the Sunday edition of the Danville Advocate Messenger). As part of his research, Gambrel interviewed Jack Farmer, an aging resident of Lincoln County, concerning stories passed down to him from his grandfather Dink Farmer about “the way it was”
in the Commonwealth after the Civil War. Gambrel used the interview as a sidebar for a two-part story about Walter G. Saunders, a former Lincoln County sheriff who was gunned down by a deputy town marshal in Richmond, Madison County. Saunders’ principal claim to fame was that he had rid the area of the notorious outlaw Bridgewater, who had terrorized the good citizens in the southern Bluegrass both during and after the Civil War. According to the Farmer family, Bridgewater used his status as a member of the Home Guard during the war to extort valuables from locals. He continued this practice after the war was over, even though his unit was officially mustered out of service in 1865. He apparently had documentation giving him authority to protect property, so he ran a sort of protection racket. As Jack Farmer explained, “He would tell them that he was guarding their property so he needed some food, money or horses and then he would take what he wanted.”

1 Danville Kentucky Advocate, August 18 and 25, 1996.

Jack Farmer argued that Bridgewater’s downfall began when he attempted to rob Walter Saunders while the latter plowed his field in the spring of 1867. The outlaw rode up and relieved Saunders of a revolver he claimed to have found while plowing and demanded that he also hand over a ring he was wearing. Saunders refused, begging, “Please, Mr. Bridgewater don’t take this ring. It was my dead mother’s ring.” In response the ruthless villain shot the now unarmed plowman, took the ring from his finger and left him for dead. Friends carried Saunders to a doctor who removed the slug and gave it to him as a souvenir. When he had recovered he used the lead to fashion a pistol ball with which he vowed to kill Bridgewater. The Farmer family, apart from a clear memory of the notorious outlaw, still owns a Spencer carbine that they claim to be the very one wielded by Bridgewater as he terrorized Lincoln County.

2 Ibid.
The myth that James H. Bridgewater was a notorious outlaw has endured in large measure because it has conveniently suited the need of several generations of Kentuckians for a functional, pro-Confederate memory of the Civil War Era. Additionally, this memory masks the extraordinary level of political and social violence that characterized post-emancipation Kentucky, a reign of terror in which Saunders apparently enthusiastically participated. Even though he died an outlaw’s death, Walter Saunders is by and large remembered as a less than notorious “colorful character,” evidence of the extent to which Democratic politicians and partisan newspaper editors succeeded in shaping attitudes and, indeed, memories in post-emancipation Kentucky. Democrats laid the blame for postwar violence on vengeful Unionists and former slaves, implying that former Confederates were the first to give up the destructive way of the gun and return to the peaceful way of the plow. Some of these former Confederates, including several of Morgan’s lieutenants, and their Democratic Party allies are remembered as the political leaders who restored law and order at war’s end. The bloody, politically motivated community conflicts evidenced during Kentucky’s ongoing internal civil war, including numerous assassinations and other types of outrages, were rendered as sadly necessary vigilantism, and Saunders, sometimes remembered as “the Handsomest Man in Kentucky,” has long been regarded as a prime example of such noble defenders of community.³

With debates raging in the Kentucky legislature over the Fourteenth Amendment and with a major state election approaching, Regulators and their allies in the southern Bluegrass did

³ Ibid. See T. J. Stiles, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 381-395, for a discussion of the highly politicized rural world in which men like Jesse James operated. Walter Saunders seems to have been just such an outlaw, given the manner in which he is remembered in Harold Wilson Coates, *Stories of Kentucky Feuds* (Knoxville: Holmes-Darst Coal Corp., 1923), 47-69.
not hesitate to threaten and sometimes assassinate their political adversaries. This area had a history of politically motivated night riders dating back to the late antebellum period, as anyone who had been affiliated with the Berea Ridge community well knew. More recently, Kentucky had witnessed widespread political violence during relatively minor elections in 1866. The election of 1867 promised further escalation of violence, as it would include both the gubernatorial race and a large number of state house and senate races. As W. R. Bourne reported in February 1867, opponents of Democrats found themselves under fire from Regulators: “I received a letter informing me that I would not be tolerated any longer in this community; and ordering me to leave forthwith. At the same time, four of the most prominent citizens of Danville were ordered to leave.”

This overt threat proved to be anything but an isolated incident, and it was a threat to be treated with utmost seriousness, as clearly demonstrated by the “Court of Judge Lynch” in Marion, Washington, and Boyle, as well as the murderous activities of a band of Lincoln County Regulators known as the Crab Orchard Gang.

Democrats in the Commonwealth held an advantage over their southern compatriots in that, for the most part, Kentucky avoided the process of Reconstruction. Having only a minimal federal presence in the state with which to contend, Kentucky’s former Confederates and their political allies could act quickly to seize control, particularly at the local level. For example, Robert Winn lamented in March of 1866:

Our State keeps its celebrity as the Champion of Conservatism--and has pardoned all her rebel soldiers, and all thieving gangs whose politics (if they have any) entitled them to the title of guerrillas; and Union Home Guards are indited by

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Grand Juries for the Penitentiary Offense of dis-arming rebel sympathizers and guerrillas at home. Loyal Kentucky!

In August, Winn, a staunch Unionist as well as a Union Army veteran, advised his sister that in his home county, ‘The Rebs elected their full ticket in Hancock by over two thirds majority, so we have a guerrilla for a Sherriff.’\textsuperscript{5} By winning elections for both local offices and state representation, Democrats quickly took control of state politics.

Its failure to secede gave the Commonwealth another characteristic, one it held in common with the border state of Missouri. Unlike states that seceded, southern identity in these states emerged in response to federal policy during the war, particularly concerning the fate of slavery, and not in response to Confederate nationalism, wartime defeat, and subsequent Reconstruction, all of which resulted in the powerfully cohesive Lost Cause mythology.\textsuperscript{6} The depth of Kentucky’s southern identity may be judged by the fact that the Commonwealth served as a primary source of funding for relief efforts among former Confederates further south, as indicated by the staging of charitable events in Frankfort and elsewhere. Of interest is that in the issue of the Frankfort \textit{Kentucky Yeoman} that ran this headline: “Concert for the Relief of the Suffering Poor of the South,” the editor related without comment an incident in Danville in which “a negro man was taken from the jail about twelve o’clock Monday night by the citizens and hung.” His use of “citizens” in describing the band who broke into the jail, seized the prisoner, and murdered him clearly indicates an attempt to rationalize such treatment of freedmen, particularly one who allegedly had been “drunk and disorderly” and who apparently

\textsuperscript{5} Robert Winn to his sister, Martha Cook, 10 March and 28 August 1866, Winn-Cook Family Papers, [Filson Historical Society, Louisville (hereinafter cited as FHS)].

resisted arrest. On the same day as these two stories ran, this Democratic editor wrote a long, scathing rebuke of federal policy regarding the destruction of slavery, no doubt meant to coincide with the one-year anniversary of the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment. He minced no words, claiming that Kentuckians had been “robbed--we used the correct term--robbed of their property amounting in value to upwards of one hundred million of dollars” by a government to which the Commonwealth had remained loyal during the Civil War. He further noted, “When we complain of the outrage we are derided and accused of disloyalty.”7 To the contrary, by December 1866 Kentucky’s Unionists, not Democrats, were in the minority, and numerous prominent local leaders were subject not merely to derision but to intimidation, physical violence, and assassination.

Unionists in the Ohio Valley were appalled by the turn of events they had witnessed in Kentucky by 1867, but nonetheless acknowledged the loss of the Commonwealth. The Unionist editor of the Frankfort Commonwealth stated that, in the aftermath of the election of 1866, Kentucky now would be ruled by “men who have for five years been in arms against the State and the Union, and who boast now that they have not changed an opinion or repented of an act, held or committed during those years of fire, blood and carnage.” Looking back on events in the Bluegrass state in 1866 and 1867, the like-minded editor of the Cincinnati Gazette commented: “Kentucky failed to secede in 1861. By a strange conjunction of circumstances what the rebels failed to do in that year, they freely realized in the year 1867.”8 Nowhere was this transformation more evident than in the southern Bluegrass. Lieutenant J. R. King, commanding the federal garrison in Lebanon, had this to say about a tall flagstaff at the newly completed Marion County fairgrounds: “They do not intend to display the ‘Yankee flag’ being satisfied

7 Frankfort Kentucky Yeoman, December 27, 1866.
8 Frankfort Commonwealth, August 10, 1866; Cincinnati Gazette, March 28, 1868.
with having the staff painted red white red the rebel colors. The staff was ordered thus painted expressly to display their favorite colors and to show their hatred for the National flag.”

In April 1867 W. H. Merrell, Assistant Inspector General for Kentucky, reported to Major General Sidney Burbank, the new assistant commissioner of the Freedman’s Bureau in Kentucky, that “Judge Lynch” continued to hold court from the back of a horse in Marion and its neighboring counties, lynching both freedmen and whites without benefit of trial. By the end of that month, Burbank had dispatched a unit of twenty-five mounted troopers to the southern Bluegrass in response to a lynching in Nicholasville. A mob, reputedly composed of men from counties south and southwest of Jessamine, had broken into the town jail, shot and mortally wounded a young freedman in jail for shooting and killing a white man, then tracked down and hanged his alleged accomplice, another young freedman. Federal troops under command of Lieutenant James H. Rice attempted to arrest suspects in the case, but they rode into an ambush. The Regulators drove off the federals, and Rice received wounds in the engagement serious enough to force his retirement from military service. A second unit of federal troops, some sixty men strong under command of Captain R. E. Johnston, moved into the area south of Nicholasville but could not locate any of the suspects, who had long since gone into hiding.

In desperation Captain Johnston hired Bridgewater to help him track down leading Regulators in the area. A native of the Lincoln County community of Highland, south of Hall’s

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9 J. R. King to B. P. Runkle, September 19, 1867, Letters Received, 1862-1869, Department of Kentucky (hereinafter cited as LRDKY), Entry 2173, U.S. Army Continental Command, Record Group 393 (hereinafter cited as USACC, RG 393) (National Archives, Washington, D.C.), original emphasis. See also J. H. Bridgewater to G. H. McLaughlin, July 1, 1867, LRDKY, Entry 2173, USACC, RG 393.

10 W. H. Merritt to John Ely, April 14, 1867, Letters Received, Assistant Commissioner’s Office (hereinafter cited as LRACO), Entry 1068, BRFAL-KY.

11 J. L. Sain to James H. Rice, April 27, 1867; R. E. Johnston to John Ely, May 4, 5, 9, 1867; John Ely to R. E. Johnston, May 31, 1867, all in LRACO, Entry 1068, BRFAL-KY.
Gap, Bridgewater had both strong allies and mortal enemies in the area. By siding with the Freedmen’s Bureau, he hoped to rid his county of a group of night riders that appear to exemplify how Regulators carried out their terror campaigns. In the later stages of the Civil War, groups of heavily armed former Confederates returned to the southern Bluegrass and began operating as anti-Union guerrillas. After the war these guerrillas teamed up with local, like-minded elite citizens. Regulators in Lincoln and surrounding counties primarily used whippings and mock lynchings to intimidate freed people into accepting labor contracts with planters. They resorted to murder when challenged by freedmen, Union Party men, or men who represented federal authority.

While claiming to be acting in the best interests of their communities, in reality these Regulators perpetuated the ongoing cycle of retributive justice that had blossomed during the Civil War in many Kentucky counties. Local authorities in the southern Bluegrass refused to intervene against them, both because Democrats dominated local politics and because their opponents had been given reason to fear for their lives if they attempted to oppose the Regulators. Thus the task of challenging the rule of night riders rested primarily with the Freedmen’s Bureau and African Americans themselves. Bridgewater officially spent only two weeks working on the case for the Bureau and made no arrests, but he identified several distinct groups operating primarily in the counties of Lincoln, Boyle, and Mercer. These bands of militant white supremacists communicated with each other and coordinated their actions when necessary, utilizing handcars at night on the local railroads to speed up communications. The leader of one of these groups, the Crab Orchard Gang, was none other than Walter G. Saunders.12

12 J. G. Nain to James H. Rice, April 27, 1867; G. H. McLaughlin to W. F. Drum, May 30, 1867; John Ely to R. E. Johnston, May 31, 1867, all in ULRLCS&CSCO, Entry 1186, BRFAL-KY; R. E. Johnston to John Ely, May 4, 5, 9, 1867, all in LRACO, Entry 1068, BRFAL-KY.
Bridgewater described the situation he faced in trying to bring Regulators to justice: “the County is under Rebel Rule completely and without help from the military[,] Union men will have to skiddaddle from here.”\(^{13}\) He made one attempt to arrest Saunders but turned back when he received a report that the Grab Orchard Gang lay in ambush for him. He feared for his life even in the county seat of Stanford. Bureau Agent W. R. Bourne of Danville cautioned that “general guerrilla warfare” would break out unless state or federal authorities took immediate action. Apparently the separate groups of Regulators kept in constant communication with each other and could rally or disperse quickly as the need arose. One Bureau agent reported that all the Regulators in the area answered to a secret “council” of ten men. Several agents, including Bridgewater, called for large-scale military intervention to break up the gangs. In response to mounting tensions in the area and increased reports of violence against freed people, Assistant Commissioner Burbank dispatched not the hoped-for squads of troops but his trusted subordinate, Benjamin P. Runkle, to conduct yet another investigation of the state of affairs in Boyle, Jessamine, Lincoln and Mercer counties.\(^{14}\)

In response to mounting tensions in the area and increased reports of violence against freed people, Assistant Commissioner Burbank dispatched Runkle, to conduct an investigation. Based on affidavits from both freedmen and prominent white men in the area, his report chronicled the plight of freed people in Lincoln and surrounding counties as well as the activities of Regulators, whom he simply dubbed “the mob.” He noted that “A reign of terror exists throughout the whole country, with few exceptions men will not speak of the acts of the mob at

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\(^{13}\) James H. Bridgewater to G. N. McLaughlin, May 25, 1867, Letters Sent and Received, Agent, Stanford (hereinafter cited as LSRA), Entry 1288, BRFAL-KY.

\(^{14}\) Quote from S. S. Fry to G. N. McLaughlin, May 25, 1867; Lewis Landrum to W. R. Bourne, June 8, 1867, all in LSRA, Entry 1288, Stanford, BRFAL-KY; W. R. Bourne to R. E. Johnston, June 9, 1867, LRACO, Entry 1068, BRFAL-KY.
all.” While Runkle apparently had some difficulty gathering intelligence from white residents, Lewis Landrum, the Freedmen’s Bureau agent in Stanford, presented him with the affidavits of three freedmen who had been dragged from their homes, mock lynched, and whipped.\textsuperscript{15}

Typifying Regulator tactics, on the night of June 12, 1867, a band of armed, mounted, disguised white men staged a raid on a free black community in northern Lincoln County. The gang moved from house to house, kicking in doors and taking men out of the houses out at gunpoint. Joseph Swope stated that his assailants hoisted him in the air by means of a rope around his neck until he passed out. They then let him down until he came to his senses, at which time the disguised men forced him to take down his pants and whipped him with a pistol belt—about thirty lashes. He testified that Henry Helm and Anderson Gilbert also received severe whippings with pistol belts. Helm and Gilbert confirmed Swope’s statement, and Gilbert noted that the night riders justified their actions on the grounds that Swope had held “a party” at his home the Saturday before the attack took place. He also noted that the masked men asked him if any of the men in the neighborhood had been in the army. He answered that he did not know, and that he had not been in the army, to which one of the men responded: “he ought to have fought for his G-d d—d freedom.”\textsuperscript{16}

Although Swope, Helm, and Gilbert apparently received no serious injuries, they doubtless found the experience deeply humiliating and degrading, and perhaps reminiscent of treatment received prior to their emancipation. Punishment by whipping represented denial on the part of whites of independent status for African Americans. Long after slavery had legally

\textsuperscript{15} Benjamin P. Runkle to John Ely, June 20, 1867, Registers and Letters Received by the Commissioner of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872, National Archives Microfilm Publication M752 (hereinafter cited as R&LRC, BRFAL, [M752]), reel 47, including enclosures.

\textsuperscript{16} Affidavits of Joseph Swope, Henry Helm, and Anderson Gilbert, all enclosed in Benjamin P. Runkle to John Ely, June 20, 1867, reel 47, R&LRC, BRFAL, M752.
ended in Kentucky, law enforcement officials whipped black perpetrators as punishment for relatively minor crimes. For example, the Freedmen’s Bureau investigated an incident in the summer of 1866 in which the town marshal of Georgetown had whipped a freedman as punishment for petty theft.17 For black women, whippings, like rape, symbolized the extent to which white men denied them the rights of free womanhood. A white Kentuckian illustrated this pattern of debasement when he commented to a Bureau agent, “What am I to do with the woman I have hired, she wants to be a lady and I can do nothing with her without whipping her. Now, Sir, she must be whipped and I do not want the ‘Bureau’ on my Back for doing so.” Some white Kentuckians, like their southern compatriots, viewed whippings and other forms of violence as essential for maintaining a labor regime based on notions of black inferiority.18

Furthermore, whippings such as those described by the three freedmen may be viewed as acts of symbolic emasculation for black men. These freedmen had failed to defend themselves and their households, and they had been rendered naked and vulnerable before their assailants. Reports from the Bluegrass indicate that Regulators sometimes actually physically emasculated their victims. Whether physical or symbolic, emasculation represented denial on the part of white men of the manhood that many black men publicly demonstrated during and after the Civil War. At the same time, violence against black men and their families helped restore a sense of manhood to some white men who had lost status, that is to say, white men who felt emasculated as a result of either the defeat of the Confederacy or abolition of slavery, or both.19

18 A. W. Lawrill to John Ely, September 30, 1867, reel 49, R&LRC, BRFAL, M752; see also Wright, Racial Violence in Kentucky, 24-25.
19 See for example Sidney Burbank to O. O. Howard, Jan. 13, 1868, R&LRC, BRFAL (M752), reel 53. On black manhood, see Jim Cullen, “‘I’s a Man Now’: Gender and African American
This contest over the meaning of freedom in Kentucky may be seen as a cultural clash between competing perceptions of manhood, but it also involved overtly social, economic, and political elements. Violence could be used either to drive off black competition or to force freed people into long-term labor contracts. In late 1866 a resident of Lincoln County informed her brother in Louisville of the following remarkable event: “I wrote to you that the Negroes would all leave here [after] Christmas. They were very much determined to go to house keeping [in Danville]…when lo and behold last night at bed time they came in and asked to stay this year upon the same terms they did last year.” It is entirely possible that these freed people were simply negotiating for better terms and, upon failing to receive them, relented. Still, in mid-1868, the same woman would write to her brother, “General of our citizens have been indicted in your city and have to appear at the October court to answer the charge of being Lynch’s men, among them number your old friends, Jim Denny, F. Peacock, John Salter & others.” Based on such a family connection to known white supremacists, one may speculate that coercive force, applied by friendly neighborhood Regulators, may have been behind the former slaves’ sudden willingness to come to terms.20

For their part, Swope, Helm, and Gilbert uniformly declared that they had been attacked as punishment for holding a “social neighborhood party.” While not indicating any biracial neighborhood activities, they claimed such parties to be a common practice by both black and white families in the area. The freedmen further stated their belief that any attempt to resist the Regulators would have gotten them killed. Regulators, as indicated by both this incident and the

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20 Gertrude Pettus of Oakford (near Stanford) to Joseph Pettus of Louisville, December 30, 1866 and July 10, 1868, Pettus-Speiden Family Papers, FHS.
attacks on Camp Nelson, sought to exercise rigid control over African American communities and the social activities that bound them together, even as slaveholders had exercised such control prior to emancipation. As Runkle noted, “the Negro, though free in theory, is practically held in a state of slavery by the acts of these men.” Additionally, his report contained ample evidence of a reign of terror against not only free blacks but also some whites in the area.21

Burbank had instructed Runkle to investigate Bridgewater, based on charges of theft that several residents of Crab Orchard had brought against him. Runkle found that opinions varied widely among the local elite as to the character of this known Unionist. Lewis Landrum, a Stanford attorney, testified that Bridgewater’s former Confederate adversaries had fabricated the charges against him. He noted that these men wanted Bridgewater dead, and that they had been terrorizing anyone who had any connection to the Freedmen’s Bureau. Prominent Unionist John Shelby of Lincoln County stated that “mad union men and rebel sympathizers” headed the local bands of Regulators. He concluded that these men had feigned support for the Union in hopes of keeping their slaves, but “when their negroes went their patriotism went with them.” Thomas Quissenbury, a Unionist lawyer from Danville, testified that Regulators committed outrages in order “to keep the negro down, and they do it.” He insisted that these bands served the interests of “the leaders of the slave [conservative Democratic] party.” Finally, commenting on the ineffectiveness of the local authorities to enforce the law, he stated: “A reign of terror so intense exists that men dare not report outrages and appear as witnesses.” He mentioned the murder of a Unionist named Divine about which the local authorities had done nothing, and he noted that Bridgewater was “a good man.” Even Stanford Postmaster Allen J. Lytle, who called

21 Runkle to Ely, June 20, 1867, R&LRC, BRFAL (M752), reel 47, including enclosures. Runkle’s emphasis.
Bridgewater “a bad man” who “keeps bad company,” testified. “the Civil Authorities are afraid to act” against area Regulators.\textsuperscript{22}

Based on such testimony, Runkle concluded that “many men of wealth and position” in the area either rode with the bands of Regulators or supported their operations. His most prominent witness, Robert J. Breckinridge, stated, “many of the most respectable men in the Country belong to the ‘Lynch’ party.” Yet, despite evidence and testimony to the contrary, Runkle argued that the bands of Regulators did not constitute overt “political organizations.”\textsuperscript{23} Ironically, he made no mention of the fact that, on June 11, 1867, Bureau agent Lewis Landrum had forwarded a petition signed by “colored citizens” of Lincoln County “asking for the right of suffrage.”\textsuperscript{24} This petition helps to explain the attacks of June 12 in that social neighborhood parties likely provided settings for circulating such petitions among freedmen and thus justified their proscription by white supremacists. Regulators and their elite sponsors feared a political alliance of free black men and white Unionists, because such an alliance would challenge the dominant Democratic Party at the county level and thereby threaten the existing and biased law enforcement structure. White supremacists in Kentucky, like similar groups in the former Confederate states, would stop at nothing to prevent such an alliance.

Indeed, in the first years after emancipation in Kentucky denial of voting rights to black men proved to be a key factor in undermining efforts to secure civil rights for all African Americans. Freedmen could not protect themselves and their families because, without the vote, they could not challenge the extant legal system. In particular, freed people fought for the right

\textsuperscript{22} Affidavits of Lewis Landrum, John Shelby, Thomas Quissenbury, and Allen J. Lytle, enclosed in Runkle to Ely, June 20, 1867, R&LRC, BRFAL (M752), reel 47.
\textsuperscript{23} Runkle to Ely, June 20, 1867, R&LRC, BRFAL (M752), reel 47, including enclosed affidavit of Robert J. Breckinridge.
\textsuperscript{24} Lewis Landrum to W. R. Bourne, June 11, 1867, LSRAS, Entry 1288, BRFAL-KY.
to testify against white assailants who invaded their homes and assaulted their families, arguing that as long as white men did so, Kentucky’s African Americans had not yet attained freedom as they defined the word. The right to testify would in theory allow them to defend newly constituted free households and newly constructed identities as free black men and women. Conversely, without full rights of citizenship, including equal protection under the law, emancipation seemed a hollow victory.\(^{25}\)

As evidenced by the Bureau’s efforts to circulate petitions for extending the franchise to freedmen in Kentucky, and the violent response these petitions provoked, Lincoln County was a key battleground in the statewide political contest between Democrats and Unionists. As one of the county’s most notorious Unionists, Bridgewater became the target of slander and, eventually, physical violence. He apparently had gotten into trouble with local authorities in the spring of 1867, when he was arrested for stealing $300 from an elderly couple in Crab Orchard. His arrest purportedly led to conflict with Saunders and his friends, who had been deputized by the local constable to bring in the battle-hardened Unionist.\(^{26}\) Whatever the facts in the above case, his real crime had been supplying the federals with a list of names of local Regulators, including identifying Walter G. Saunders as leader of the Crab Orchard Gang. Freedmen’s Bureau agents who knew him asked their superiors to extend his contract, both for his value as an investigator and his personal protection. Runkle, who would soon take over as assistant commissioner for the Bureau in Kentucky, vouched for him as well. Despite these appeals and character references, and despite ongoing Regulator activity, Special Agent Bridgewater received an honorable


\(^{26}\) Danville *Kentucky Advocate*, August 25, 1996.
discharge from the Bureau on June 15, 1867, “his service being no longer required, he having performed the duty for which he was employed.”

After his discharge, Bridgewater remained active in combating the Crab Orchard Gang. The Collections Office of the Internal Revenue Service hired him in June to investigate tax fraud in Lincoln County. His authority as such would have allowed him to target his enemies, who as anti-Union men no doubt cared little for paying federal taxes imposed both during and after the Civil War. Bridgewater, who already represented a threat as a former guerrilla fighter and Kentucky Unionist, now clearly represented what his detractors viewed as ongoing federal interference in state and local social, political and economic affairs. As a detective working first for the Freedmen’s Bureau then for the Internal Revenue Service, he no doubt ranked as a high priority on the regulators’ agenda to quash all opposition in Lincoln and surrounding counties. Still, one should not assume that his connections to state and federal authorities exonerate Bridgewater of either wrongdoing or very personal, vindictive motivations. To the contrary, his status as an agent of the Internal Revenue Service gave him a great deal of local power to be used or misused as he saw fit. Still, no evidence survives that implicates him in crimes of the severity regularly committed by his Regulator opponents, including both lynchings and political assassinations.

As the state election of 1867 approached, tensions in the southern Bluegrass Region reached critical mass. On July 1, Bridgewater wrote to G. H. McLaughlin requesting help in the form of a squad of federal troopers to apprehend the men who had cut down the flagstaff over Major General William “Bull” Nelson’s grave at Camp Nelson in southern Jessamine County, a

27 Ibid; R. E. Johnston to John Ely, June 14, 1867 (quote), LRACO, Entry 1068, BRFAL-KY.  
day’s ride north of Stanford. Bridgewater claimed to have word that “the parties who committed this outrage are all living near Crab Orchard.” Further, he noted that these men not only had gone so far as to “molest the last resting place of a gallant Union Soldier” but also supposedly had planned the assassination of Major Runkle when he was in the area conducting his investigation into the activities of area Regulators. Although McLaughlin acted on Bridgewater’s request, he looked for little support in bringing the perpetrators to justice, lamenting, “The people are scared to do anything for fear of personal violence.” He also noted “Bridgewater expects a visit from the Regulators.” On July 16, Governor Bramlette himself, by personal letter, gave Bridgewater extraordinary powers to arrest Regulators in Lincoln County, and he promised to “furnish a sufficient guard” for making these arrests, should Bridgewater ask for it. Bridgewater no doubt planned to act fast, so as to take advantage of Bramlette’s last month in office. Thus when Walter Saunders and others of the Crab Orchard Gang rode into Stanford on July 18 looking for Bridgewater, they appear to have had in mind a preemptive strike, by all indications capitalizing on Bridgewater’s trust of a man named George Hays to catch the wary guerrilla fighter off his guard and eliminate him before he could act.

James H. Bridgewater had aligned himself with one side in a political fight that was at times a shooting war, and it cost him his life on July 18, when a half dozen Regulators rode into town, located the former Guardsman in a Stanford saloon, and opened fire. After riddling

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29 Bridgewater to McLaughlin, July 1, 1867 (first quote); G. H. McLaughlin to W. F. Drum, July 3, 1867 (second quote), both in LRDKY, Entry 2173, USACC, RG 393; Runkle to Ely, June 20, 1867, LRACO, Entry 1068, BRFAL-KY. General Nelson, who established Camp Dick Robinson in Kentucky, was shot and killed at the Galt House in Louisville by fellow Union officer Jefferson C. Davis. Camp Nelson was named in his honor, and at one point he was buried there. His body is now buried in his hometown of Maysville (John E. Kleber, ed., The Kentucky Encyclopedia [Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992], 676).

30 Thomas E. Bramlette to James H. Bridgewater, July 16, 1867, enclosed in W. F. Drum to Sidney Burbank, Dec. 24, 1867; G. H. McLaughlin to W. F. Drum, July 31, 1867, both in LRDKY, Entry 2173, USACC, RG 393.
Bridgewater’s body with 16 bullets, reportedly wounding two others in the process, his assassins fled east on the Wilderness Road and turned themselves in to the Crab Orchard magistrate. They entered a plea of self-defense on the grounds that he had threatened to kill them and, since he was a man of his word, they thought they should kill him first. After a trial at Crab Orchard in which no witnesses from Stanford came forth to testify, Saunders and the rest were acquitted. The Freedmen’s Bureau continued to investigate the murder and determined that Saunders had been a Confederate guerrilla during the war. Several of his subordinates, all implicated in the murder of Bridgewater, had served in regular Confederate units. Although they compiled such evidence, the Bureau proved unable to make any arrests.31

In his interview with Gambrel, Jack Farmer recalled his family’s version of how the notorious Bridgewater met his end in the saloon of a Stanford hotel. Dink Farmer, only sixteen years old at the time, allegedly told Saunders that he was willing to kill Bridgewater himself if not for the possibility that they would hang him for it. On the other hand, if Saunders killed him it would be justified, as Bridgewater had shot him and left him for dead. Saunders, Dink Farmer and other men from Crab Orchard rode into Stanford to kill the outlaw. Distracted by a game of either checkers or cards, Bridgewater ignored the warning of a friend, saying that he did not wish to be disturbed. Saunders burst into the room and Bridgewater went for his favorite weapon, a Spencer carbine standing in the corner. Before he could raise his rifle, Saunders shot and killed him with the very ball he had cast from Bridgewater’s own bullet. The notorious outlaw’s reign of terror had come to an end, and Walter Saunders had become a hero to many residents of Lincoln and surrounding counties.32

31 R. E. Johnston to John Ely, July 22, 1867, LRACO, Entry 1068, BRFAL-KY; W. R. Bourne to R. E. Johnston, July 29, 1867, ULRLCS&CSCO, Entry 1186, BRFAL-KY.
32 Danville Kentucky Advocate, August 18, 1996.
David Gambrel later presented an account of the death of Bridgewater that differed from the Farmer family’s memory. In this version, as in Farmer’s, Bridgewater was shot and killed by a group of Crab Orchard men, but Gambrel concluded that Bridgewater had threatened to kill them for their part in arresting him that spring, so apparently they decided to kill him first. He made no mention here of the alleged shooting of Walter Saunders as a possible motive. He did state that on July 18, 1867, Walter G. Saunders, Daniel Collier, Carroll Humber, Charles McAdams, J. H. Tucker, and George Hayes (no mention is made of the youthful Dink Farmer, who perhaps exaggerated his involvement) rode into Stanford, looking for Bridgewater. They found him in a saloon, opened fire with their pistols, and apparently riddled him with as many as sixteen bullets, far more than the one mythic ball fashioned by Saunders. The men in short order were taken into custody, tried, and acquitted. Gambrel gave no information on who took them into custody, the nature of the trial, or how they came to be acquitted.33

This account of Bridgewater’s murder was based primarily on accounts published in 1867 by former Confederate Walter Haldeman. After spending much of the Civil War in exile in Georgia, Haldeman had returned in 1865 to his post as editor of the Louisville Daily Courier and, with all the flair of a conquering hero, quickly transformed his old rag into arguably the most influential newspaper in Kentucky at this time. Only when another ex-Confederate, Henry Watterson, took over as editor of the Louisville Journal would Haldeman have a serious rival, and he would quickly overcome that problem by orchestrating a merger of the papers, with Watterson as chief editor and himself as the organizational power behind the scenes. Like most newspaper editors of his day, Haldeman published a distinctly partisan paper with an editorial slant in favor of a specific political faction. He immediately attempted to turn the murder of

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33 Danville Kentucky Advocate, November 9, 1997.
Bridgewater, ostensibly a black eye for his conservative Democratic political allies, into a victory for law and order in post-bellum Kentucky. He broke the story to a wide readership on July 20, 1867, under the bold headline: “THE KILLING OF BRIDGEWATER. GREAT EXCITEMENT AT STANFORD. Full Particulars of the Affair.”

The dispatch that followed, forwarded from Lebanon Junction, in nearby Marion County, Kentucky, on July 19, called Bridgewater’s death a “tragedy.” The writer stated that a well-armed group of men had ridden in from Crab Orchard for the express purpose of killing Bridgewater, for whom they had an intense hatred. Though the dispatch made reference to the fact that Bridgewater “had a party of followers,” there was no indication that anyone was present to help defend him against his assailants. The dispatch noted that he was hit sixteen times and likely died instantly. His killers then left Stanford and returned to Crab Orchard, where they turned themselves in to the local authorities. The Crab Orchard magistrate immediately released them on bail, pending a hearing.

On the same page, Haldeman published a dispatch from a correspondent in Stanford, Kentucky, named “Harry,” under the heading “MURDEROUS AFFAIR IN LINCOLN COUNTY. The Notorious Bridgewater Killed.” Harry noted the time of the killing: six-thirty in the afternoon, July 18. He stated that Bridgewater was playing checkers when a party of eight men rode into town and killed him. He noted that Bridgewater’s own party had left town a week earlier, leaving him virtually alone to face his attackers. Harry further noted that his assailants had riddled the villain’s body with fifteen pistol balls. As the attackers rode out of town, headed back to Crab Orchard, several of Bridgewater’s “friends” waved their pistols in the air, but no shots were exchanged. Harry made a telling statement about the way in which Bridgewater

34 Louisville Daily Courier, July 20, 1867.
35 Ibid.
would come to be remembered by many Kentuckians when he wrote: “Bridgewater was a bad, desperate character, and has been the terror of good citizens in this and the adjoining counties for years past, but the manner of his death should be condemned by all law abiding men.” He hoped that this killing would mark the end of “troubles” that had plagued the county in recent months, but he made no mention of what these troubles were.\footnote{Ibid.}

On July 25, Haldeman published an update from Harry that discussed the trial and acquittal of Bridgewater’s killers. After turning themselves in at Crab Orchard, they were quickly brought before a tribunal consisting of two local magistrates, “Esquires Carson and Watkins, Justices of the Peace.” Attorneys Hill, Harris, and Durham represented the defendants, Walter G. Saunders, Charles McAdams, James H. Tucker, Daniel Collier, Carroll Humber, and George Hays, while Robert Blain argued the case for the Commonwealth. The defendants confessed to riding into town, leaving their horses at the Myers Hotel stable, crossing Main Street, entering Davis Saloon, and shooting Bridgewater to death as he played checkers. Upon hearing their confession, the prosecution apparently rested. After all, the defendants had just confessed to murder. But the defense argued that most of these men had served as deputies to the Crab Orchard constable in April when Bridgewater was arrested and charged with robbing a man named Chandler. The defendants testified that he had become very angry and had threatened to kill them. After his arrest, Bridgewater had been released on bail pending convening of the Circuit Court, and he allegedly rode back to Crab Orchard with eight men looking for those who had arrested him and threatening to kill them all. They testified that he was a man who kept his word, so they deemed it better to strike first rather than wait for him to attack them. Thus they argued that when they gathered in Crab Orchard with murderous intent,
rode into Stanford, tracked down Bridgewater in the saloon, and shot him repeatedly, they were simply acting in self-defense. \(^\text{37}\)

Bridgewater’s killers described him as a violent, cruel, bloodthirsty man who once “swore that he would cut out Daniel Collier’s heart and eat it.” But Harry noted that he must have become almost resigned to his fate. How else, reasoned this correspondent, could such a wary, battle-hardened man be caught off guard so easily? From his seat in the saloon, he theoretically could have seen his enemies ride into town, dismount across the street, and walk toward the saloon, and surely he should have guessed their intent. Apart from his theorizing, Harry also wrote an interesting epitaph for Bridgewater:

He was a bold, desperate and unscrupulous man, unrelenting in his hate and a dangerous enemy. He was raised in this county, and during the war was in the Federal service, first as a lieutenant and afterward as a major. Numerous instances are related of his blood-thirstiness and cruelty which had given him a wide spread notoriety. He was proven, however, to have been kind and generous toward those who espoused his quarrels. And he is said to have been a member in good standing of the order of Free Masonry.

Finally, Harry noted that all of Bridgewater’s killers were quite young, Tucker and McAdams in fact being less than twenty years of age. He mentioned that it was a tragedy that these young men had been forced to commit murder at such a tender age. True to form for the Courier’s coverage of the killing, he failed to mention the tragedy of the widow and fatherless children left behind by the murder of Bridgewater. \(^\text{38}\)

On July 26 Haldeman published further coverage of the trial in Crab Orchard. This dispatch, written by “Corsair,” noted that, aside from the aforementioned magistrates, a Judge Stewart also presided over the trial. Corsair stated that “the character of the deceased was proven to be that of a bad and dangerous man, and one who would carry into execution any

\(^{37}\) Louisville Courier, July 25, 1867.  
\(^{38}\) Ibid.
threat which he might make.” He also noted that the county attorney, Blain, had done all he
could to prosecute the case. And he noted that the killers were “highly respectable young men”
and that “politics had nothing to do in this matter of killing.” Rather, Bridgewater had brought
this on himself by first robbing Mr. Chandler of three hundred dollars then threatening the lives
of the men who arrested him. After his arrest for this charge, a judge ruled that there were
sufficient grounds to bring the case to trial in the Circuit Court, and Bridgewater was bound over
for trial on fifteen hundred dollars bond. He met bail and was released, but this only heightened
tensions between him and the men from Crab Orchard. According to their defense, they feared
for their lives, so they killed him. Corsair closed his dispatch by noting that “we have no
‘Regulators,’ nor have we had any. The civil law protects all good citizens.”

David Gambrel’s article on Bridgewater relied heavily on the Courier’s version of
events, a version widely circulated in Kentucky and printed in newspapers with similar political
leanings such as the Cincinnati Enquirer. Because Gambrel trusted Haldeman for “the facts” he
unknowingly perpetuated the memory of the notorious outlaw Bridgewater for yet another
generation of Kentuckians. However, an alternative version of the story appeared at the time of
Bridgewater’s murder in the Lexington Kentucky Statesman, a Republican-minded newspaper
edited by William Owsley Goodloe and his cousin, former Freedmen’s Bureau agent William
Cassius Goodloe. The Statesman reported on July 23, 1867, “one of the most cold-blooded and
atrocious assassinations that we have been called upon to chronicle, was committed on Thursday
last upon the person of the gallant Major James H. Bridgewater.” According to their story,
Bridgewater was sitting in the office of a Stanford hotel playing dominoes when a gang of five
gunmen burst in and shot him at least fifteen times. The story notes that Bridgewater was

39 Louisville Courier, July 26, 1867.
alleged to have threatened the men, but that such threats were no excuse for cold-blooded murder. The paper called for an investigation, with speedy punishment to be meted out to the perpetrators. The Cincinnati *Gazette* also ran this version of the story.\(^4\)

The *Statesman*, unable to produce a daily edition for financial reasons, followed up on the Bridgewater story a week later. The next article, based on the report of “a reliable gentleman who resides in Stanford,” noted Bridgewater’s military service as a hunter of guerrillas, stating that he was “an unflinching Union man.” The reporter blamed his murder on men possessed by “the fell spirit of rebellion and pro-slavery fanaticism.” According to this account, the men from Crab Orchard had already attempted to assassinate Bridgewater on two previous occasions. On both occasions, Bridgewater was forewarned and had rallied his bodyguard, consisting of his brother John, brothers-in-law Samuel and Labron Dawes (spelled Daws in the article), and his nephews Samuel and William Polloch, to his defense. Still, this small group was badly outnumbered by the Crab Orchard gang. In June 1867, Judge Isaac Cook, judge for Lincoln County, had supposedly extended his protection to Bridgewater. Perhaps because of this judicial intervention, he let his guard down. His kinfolk/bodyguard departed for Missouri in July to complete arrangements for relocating their families, apparently expecting Bridgewater soon to follow them. According to the *Statesman*, George Hays, whom Bridgewater thought to be his friend, in the end betrayed him. He allegedly guided Saunders and the other Crab Orchard men to the public room where Bridgewater was playing checkers, then walked up behind him, drew a pistol and shot him in the back of the head. Following his lead, the rest of the men fired a

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\(^4\) Lexington *Kentucky Statesman*, July 23, 1867 (see the Cincinnati *Enquirer* and the Cincinnati *Gazette*, late July 1867, for reprints of these articles); Thomas D. Clark, *A History of Kentucky* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1937), 245. Clark points out that the prewar *Kentucky Statesman* had been a southern Democratic organ, whereas the Goodloes’ version served central Kentucky’s Old Whig Unionists and Republicans. William Owsley Goodloe, an 1858 graduate of Centre College, was the son of Judge William C. Goodloe of Lexington.
number of shots into the head and torso of their fallen enemy, though the first shot most likely had been fatal.

The report in the *Statesman* further noted that the Crab Orchard men rode out of Stanford in defiance of the local authorities, who perhaps had rallied at the sound of so many pistol shots being fired in the middle of town. The assassins instead surrendered themselves to the Crab Orchard authorities. The ensuing trial, dubbed a “farce,” was a set piece, as no witnesses from Stanford dared testify against the defendants. The reporter concluded by stating that “I have never heard of a rebel being brought to justice and punished for killing a Union man in the Seventh Congressional District since Lee surrendered to Grant, notwithstanding scores of Union men have been brutally murdered by them.” He also noted that the Crab Orchard men were believed to a man to be “rebel sympathizers and returned rebel soldiers.” By printing this account of Bridgewater’s death, Goodloe attempted to make him a Unionist martyr who had been betrayed by a false friend. In so doing, the editor no doubt expected his readers to make a connection between George Hays and Democratic politicians who had expressed their loyalty to the Union for much of the war, only betray true Unionists at war’s end by siding with returning Confederates and southern sympathizers.

As may be seen in the conflicting accounts published in these prominent regional newspapers, the story of the death of Bridgewater was manipulated to suit the needs of diverse groups of Kentuckians. The *Statesman*, engaged in a losing battle on behalf of the state’s dwindling Union Party, used the murder of Bridgewater to send a clarion call to all loyal Unionists. The message was clear: stand up and be counted or die at the hands of rebels and

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41 Lexington *Kentucky Statesman*, July 30, 1867. The *Statesman* was struggling to stay afloat by mid-1867. Due to a reduction in circulation, the editors could not afford to print a daily edition, thus reflecting the decline in popularity of the Union Party in Kentucky.

42 Ibid.
their traitorous Democratic allies. The Courier, hoping to demonstrate that Democrats were restoring law and order in the aftermath of the war, argued that Bridgewater had to die to preserve the peace. Haldeman may not have condoned the method used by the Crab Orchard men, but in their defense he portrayed Bridgewater as a bloodthirsty desperado who needed a good killing. He even hinted that the outlaw had resigned himself to his fate, accepting the judgment of his enemies that he deserved to die for his crimes and violent ways. His killers, after all, were “highly respectable” men who should be deferred to in such matters. Finally, Haldeman assured his readership that such things did not happen to “good citizens.”

Despite Haldeman’s and others’ claims to the contrary, Bridgewater’s murder was representative of the extraordinarily high level of violence that defined Kentucky’s post-war experience, particularly violence directed against the freed people of Kentucky and those who sought to aid them. The fact that the killing of Bridgewater was covered by major newspapers in Lexington, Louisville, and Cincinnati and became a source of contention among editors with differing political agendas reveals the extent to which Civil War Era memories were being shaped to serve political as well as group or community needs. The story of the notorious

43 Louisville Courier, July 26, 1867.
outlaw Bridgewater became the dominant memory and resurfaced several more times over the years. For example, David Gambrel noted that when Augden Bridgewater died in 1893, mention was made of his notorious brother and how he had terrorized central Kentucky during the Civil War. In particular, Bridgewater’s name tended to resurface in association with election campaigns. The memory of the death of this “outlaw” thus served to justify murder as a part of reordering post-war society. Editors who defended Bridgewater’s assassins implicitly accepted murder as a means to maintain order, establish race control in the aftermath of emancipation, and ensure political victory for white supremacists. By rationalizing the deaths of Bridgewater and other Unionists, editors such as Haldeman attempted to lend an air of legitimacy both to Regulator violence and to the dominant Democratic Party in spite of escalating levels of racial and political violence in the late 1860s.

Regarding the beatings suffered by the three freedmen, Swope, Helm, and Gilbert, this incident brought attention to the plight of all of Kentucky’s freed people as their affidavits made their way up the chain of command to the desk of Freedmen’s Bureau Commissioner Oliver O. Howard in Washington. Pain and humiliation aside, their statements served no less a political purpose than petitions for the franchise. Such reports of outrages led to the inclusion of Kentucky in the 1871 congressional investigation of racial violence committed by the Ku Klux Klan, and indeed by this time numerous Regulator bands openly identified themselves as Ku Klux. Still, the efforts of freed people to acquire the franchise in 1867 caused an immediate backlash in the Commonwealth, culminating in widespread violence and intimidation during the state election of that year. Democrats, thanks in large measure to their ability to play on voters’

45 Danville Kentucky Advocate, November 9, 1997.
fears of the consequences of racial equality, won the 1867 election by a landslide, even electing a suspected southern sympathizer as governor.\textsuperscript{46}

Despite such a victory and contrary to the expressed hopes of Democratic editors and politicians, lawlessness became the norm in the Lincoln County area in the months and years after Bridgewater’s murder. Local citizens were understandably hesitant to stand up to this onslaught. After all, if Regulators could so brazenly assassinate the battle-tested, extraordinarily well-connected Bridgewater and get away with it, who would dare to oppose them? Regulator activity against freed people and their allies continued unabated through the end of 1867, despite the overwhelming triumph by Democrats in the state election. The Freedmen’s Bureau, under a federal mandate to phase out operations in Kentucky, could do little to intervene. Kentucky’s new governor eventually would have to take action against area Regulators in order to maintain some semblance of state legitimacy in the southern Bluegrass and neighboring counties, as well as to demonstrate that the Commonwealth no longer required the presence of federal troops to ensure law and order.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{46} Howard, \textit{Black Liberation in Kentucky}, 146-52.
\textsuperscript{47} Lewis Landrum to G. H. McLaughlin, July 30, 1867; Martin Norton to W. F. Drum, Aug. 20, 1867; Martin Norton to B. P. Runkle, Sept. 1, 1867; Gov. John W. Stevenson to Gen. George H. Thomas, Sept. 20, 1867; G. H. McLaughlin to B. P. Runkle, Sept. 26, 1867; G. H. McLaughlin to W. F. Drum, Oct. 27, 1867, G. H. McLaughlin to W. F. Drum, Apr. 5, 1868, all in LRDKY, Entry 2173, USACC, RG 393.
With a conservative Democratic victory in the state election of 1867, Kentucky’s Civil War Era identity shift from a prewar western state to a wartime border state to a postwar southern state was complete. Ascendance of this southern identity not only coincided with widespread racial violence, it also signaled the beginning of a long cycle of political turmoil in which assassination proved to be a viable tactic by which to attain or maintain political power. White supremacists, in turn, justified both racial and political violence by decrying the alternative, which they frequently referred to as “negro domination.” The fear of Negro domination or Negro rule, as it was sometimes called, was based on popular notions of innate white superiority, particularly those espoused by Darwinists such as British philosopher Thomas H. Huxley. Though generally in favor of emancipation, as slavery mitigated natural selection, such theorists challenged the notion of absolute racial equality as going against the natural order. Indeed, even a great many Republicans who favored legal equality did so with the understanding that, socially and politically, freed people eventually would be relegated to an appropriate niche in dominant white society, in which they would either succeed or fail on the basis of their own efforts. Further, the notion of absolute equality initially enjoyed little support among northern philanthropists and former anti-slavery activists, with a few notable exceptions.¹

For their part, Democrats argued that any hint of racial equality would inevitably lead to a
violent contest for domination between the races, a contest that, in their minds at least, African
Americans most certainly would lose, possibly to the point of extinction. Thus they argued that
white supremacy, ensured by denial of civil and political rights to freed people, was in fact the
only benevolent solution to the problem of freedom posed by emancipation. Southern
Democrats in particular raised a hue and cry against those they labeled Radicals, whom they
accused of secretly wanting not just black equality but racial amalgamation. But northern
Democrats also challenged Republicans, accusing them of attempting to undermine what they
called “white democracy,” the political dominance in the North of white working men.2

In the end, both southern and northern Democrats contributed greatly to the ascendance
of the radical wing of the Republican Party. Under President Johnson’s lenient policies, southern
Democrats, quickly forgiven their treason, returned to power at the state level and imposed Black
Codes and other measures designed to keep freed people in a virtual state of slavery, at least in
terms of their economic and social status. In appalled reaction to this spectacle, northern voters
turned to the Republican Party in droves, thereby giving it political supremacy in Congress. At
the same time, this party increasingly was dominated by its more radical wing, with the result
that, after the midterm election of 1866, Republicans imposed Congressional Reconstruction on
former Confederate states, including a forced acceptance of the Fourteenth Amendment, which
accorded citizenship to freed people, especially equal protection under the law. Congress
eventually passed the Fifteenth Amendment as well, granting black men the franchise.3

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& Row, 1988), 199-227; Leon Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery*
In the Commonwealth, which had, and exercised, the freedom to reject both the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, even as it had the Thirteenth, Negro domination would not be imposed by federal reconstruction governance and enforced by ongoing military occupation. Instead, it rather theoretically could be imposed on white Kentuckians by state-level Radical politicians, particularly those with connections to Republicans in Congress. The call to rally around the flag of white supremacy would ring loud from the podium as a new Democratic governor was inaugurated in 1867, and it was made all the more stunning because this was not South Carolina or Mississippi, with their newly freed and increasingly politically empowered black majorities. This was loyal Kentucky, where by 1867 freed people were outnumbered five to one by white residents, and where, judging by the rhetoric of outgoing Governor Bramlette, Democrats had never lost control of state government, much less been subjected to Republican, let alone Radical, rule. Far from actually being afraid of Negro domination, Kentuckians, seemingly as always, were concerned about local control and about ensuring that neither state nor federal authorities interfered with local matters, political, social, and especially racial.4

During the violent summer of 1867, small federal garrisons remained stationed at hot spots throughout the Commonwealth as tension built over the state election scheduled for early August. In Lebanon, J. R. King continued to serve as garrison commander, despite numerous threats made against him by Regulators. On June 13, he reported, “I have been compelled to keep a strong guard at the jail the past few nights, expecting an attack from the Regulators of this and the adjacent Counties who seem determined to hang some of the prisoners now in the hands of the Civil Authorities.” Judge Newman of the Kentucky circuit court had appealed to King to

post this guard, “as he had no confidence in a guard composed of citizens, as they cannot be depended upon, as they are, as well as the County Officials, afraid to take any measures, either in prosecuting, mentioning names, or even standing guard at the jail.” King went on to note, “The mentioning of the name Judge Lynch makes the blood of the people chill.”

King learned that Regulators in Marion, Boyle, and Washington counties had become so bold as to form a plot to kidnap him and force him to order the guard away from the Lebanon jail. He estimated Regulator strength at between one and three hundred on any given night, though the night riders typically operated in smaller units, “prowling around in all directions through the country, visiting homes, compelling respectable people to get out of bed, under the pretence of seeking suspected parties.” Additionally, Regulators sent men into Lebanon each night to hang out on street corners and observe the jail. Civil authorities either could not or would not take action against these men. King went on to “venture the assertion that there is not a single Civil Officer, in either of the counties of Marion, Boyle, or Washington but who knows one or more of the members of these gangs, but who does not say a word against them from fear of retaliation.” He called for military suppression of the gangs to begin at once, as he and his men were exhausted from standing guard all night both in defense of the jail and in self-defense. For his part, King confidently stated, “I have prepared myself for this proposed visit, and shall give Lynch’s men a warm reception.”

J. R. King would have to maintain that same, exhausting level of vigilance for many months to come, as Regulators ruled the night in the area round Lebanon well into the next decade.

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5 J. R. King to W. F. Drum, June 13, 1867, Letters Received, Department of Kentucky (hereinafter cited as LRDKY), Entry 2173, United States Army Continental Command, Record Group 393 (hereinafter cited as USACC, RG 393) (National Archives, Washington, D.C.).

6 Ibid. Original emphasis.
The murder of James H. Bridgewater in mid July led to direct federal military action against Regulators in the Danville area, particularly against the Crab Orchard Gang, but such action proved easier to order than to execute. Captain G. H. McLaughlin of the federal garrison at Danville provided much insight into the kinds of problems confronting both federal and state authorities regarding Regulators. Already on the hunt for the group that had cut down the flagstaff at General Nelson’s grave, he now turned his attention squarely on the locally notorious Crab Orchard Gang in an all-out effort to capture Bridgewater’s assassins. Several of the men involved had reputedly left the state, but McLaughlin placed spies “who will notify me when they return.” Through his network, the federal officer learned that Walter Saunders and others had been in Stanford just hours before he arrived in search of them. Indeed, Bureau agent Lewis Landrum had seen Saunders talking with a Lincoln County judge named Jessee Cook, after which the Regulator and several of his compatriots jumped on their horses and galloped out of town. Saunders was in such a rush that he even refused to wait on the town blacksmith to finish shoeing his horse.7

By all appearances, a spy had warned the judge that federal troops were marching toward Stanford, and so he warned Saunders. Landrum found the behavior of Judge Cook particularly disturbing, and he hinted that the judge, who heretofore had been viewed as a Bridgewater supporter or at worst a neutral party in his conflict with Saunders, instead might have been a co-conspirator in his murder. When he finally arrived in Stanford, McLaughlin sent out scouts, but he failed to make any arrests, and so a couple of days later he marched his men back to Danville. Additionally, he received reports that the Gang had just managed to lay hands on forty new Spencer carbines. If he seemed tentative in his actions regarding Regulators, McLaughlin had

7 G. H. McLaughlin to W. F. Drum, July 31, 1867, LRDKY, Entry 2173, USACC, RG 393, including enclosed letter from Lewis Landrum to G. H. McLaughlin, July 30, 1867.
good reason, as he knew his men were seriously overmatched. Unlike virtually all of the men they were trying to arrest, none of McLaughlin’s men were mounted. He concluded his report by “respectfully” asking his superiors “if thirty or forty of my men could not be mounted giving me the same number of Spencer Rifles and pistols.”

As had been the case with guerrilla incursions during the war, the presence of troops proved to be a less than adequate deterrent to Regulators. In August, Lieutenant Martin Norton marched the Danville garrison on Crab Orchard itself in an effort to arrest Walter Saunders and others. Throwing out skirmishers and rear guards as he went, Norton moved slowly but safely toward what he deemed a rebel stronghold, complete with at least one house “out of which they have made a fort.” He also took with him witnesses to help him identify Bridgewater’s killers. The road southeast from Stanford had been closed by his orders, and so he hoped to prevent any advance warning from reaching the men he sought to capture. Further, Lewis Landrum had sent at least one “reliable man” ahead to Crab Orchard as a scout. Unfortunately, the spy apparently balked at his task and thus never showed up to meet Norton. Still, the lieutenant pressed on, his men searching houses and barns as they moved into the community. But Norton’s men had marched from Danville through Stanford to Crab Orchard that day on foot, a distance of twenty miles, and so were leg-weary. When the soldiers finally encountered a group of suspects, the Crab Orchard men simply hopped on their horses and rode away. Norton wryly noted that his tired infantrymen proved “no match in speed for the magnificent animals on which these men are mounted.” He concluded, “If my men or a portion of my men were mounted, I would make a dash at them some night.” Like his superior, McLaughlin, Norton begged not only for mounts

8 Ibid.

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for his beleaguered foot soldiers, but also a supply of the powerful Spencer carbines with which at least some of his opponents purportedly were armed.\textsuperscript{9}

Norton perhaps was unaware that the hazards of trying to arrest Regulators, particularly by making “a dash at them some night,” had been clearly demonstrated around the end of April when one of his predecessors, Lieutenant James H. Rice, was ambushed while trying to make an arrest.\textsuperscript{10} Mobility, coupled with intimate knowledge of local geography, gave area Regulators an insurmountable edge over their pursuers. Even when dedicated agents and officers ferreted out their headquarters, hiding places, or rendezvous points, making arrests still proved highly problematic. Sergeant Joseph M. Robbins now took up near Crab Orchard, observing Regulator movement from a hidden location “about 50 yards in rear of Fisher’s house” and cultivating informants, including “a negro by the name of Sam Rocket.” Among other tidbits of information he gathered, Robbins learned that the Crab Orchard Gang could rally at a set point when needed, called to arms by timed blasts from a steam whistle located at “a [saw] mill somewhere between Crab Orchard and Stanford.” In turn, this large group could just as quickly disperse “for the Knobs in that vicinity in small bands of 3 and 4 together.” Thus they could attain coveted local superiority, only to scatter into the hills and rills when challenged or pursued by federal troops.\textsuperscript{11}

As numerous reports imply, Regulators not only had fast horses and remarkable organization, but also superior firepower to their federal opponents. While military commanders

\textsuperscript{9} Martin Norton to W. F. Drum, August 20, 1867, LRDKY, Entry 2173, USAAC, RG 393; A. Benson Brown to John Ely, August 25, 1867, Unregistered Letters Received, Lexington Chief Superintendent and Chief Subassistant Commissioner’s Office (hereinafter cited as ULRLCS&CSWO), Entry 1186, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105 (hereinafter cited as BRFAL-KY) (National Archives, Washington, D.C.).

\textsuperscript{10} R. E. Johnston to John Ely, May 4, 5, 9, 1867, all in Letters Received, Assistant Commissioner’s Office (hereinafter cited as LRACO), Entry 1068, BRFAL-KY.

\textsuperscript{11} Joseph M. Robbins to Martin Norton, August 30, 1867, enclosed in Martin Norton to B. P. Runkle, August 31, 1867, LRDKY, Entry 2173, USAAC, RG 393.
had to make do with squads of foot soldiers armed with Springfield rifled muskets, and while Freedmen’s Bureau agents had to file paperwork simply to receive a Colt revolver with which to make arrests, their opponents, who always seemed to have good mounts, simply had to drop by the local hardware store to buy all the weapons and ammunition they needed. As the federal government mustered out troops by the hundreds of thousands, it also began to cut deals by which to divest its warehouses of tons of firearms for which it had no use. Manufacturers such as Remington gladly bought back whole shipments of unused revolvers for a bargain rate, hoping to resell them on the civilian market.¹² Their advertising strategy proved to be simple and effective: home defense and personal security.

Certainly the Civil War had given many civilians cause to feel unsafe in their own homes, and it had convinced many men that a firearm should be an essential part of their wardrobe. Veterans in particular had grown accustomed to being armed at all times and refused to give up the practice. Though they may have known only muzzle-loaders as privates in infantry regiments, after the war they sought out more compact sources of firepower, including the tried, trusted, and ubiquitous Colt and Remington cap-and-ball revolvers, and cartridge-firing, lever-action carbines, particularly the legendary seven-shot Spencer and the far more rare Model 1860 Henry. Given the tremendous social upheaval brought on by emancipation, many white residents in states with substantive black populations armed themselves against any potential uprising on the part of freedmen, who now had ample opportunity, not to mention just cause, to themselves take up arms. Rumors of such uprisings ran rampant throughout the former Confederacy, and Kentucky seems to have had its fair share, as well. Newspaper ads played on such fears as the Commonwealth became even more of an armed camp than it had been during

the war, particularly on the part of its civilians. Whereas many a prewar dispute had been settled with fists or at worst bowie knives, now such disputes, more often than not, would involve firearms wielded by the disputing parties.\footnote{See Steven Hahn, “‘Extravagant Expectations of Freedom’: Rumour, Political Struggle, and the Christmas Insurrection Scare of 1865 in the American South,” Past and Present (November 1997): 122-158, for how widespread, powerful, and empowering such rumors could be.}

As a state that avoided Reconstruction, Kentucky proved to be a wide-open market to gun dealers. By the summer of 1866, newspapers such as the Frankfort Commonwealth and the Paducah Herald had begun running ads for H. Remington and Sons, featuring a beautifully rendered image of an 1858 Army Model revolver. With phrasing that might have impressed the legendary salesman Richard Warren Sears, a note below the image read, “In these days of Housebreaking and Robbery every House, Store, Bank, and Office should have one of Remington’s Revolvers.” By 1867, newspapers ran continuous ads on behalf of hardware stores selling firearms. For example, on February 22, the Frankfort Kentucky Yeoman ran an ad for Joseph Griffith & Son of Louisville, “Direct Importers and Dealers in Breech and Muzzle Loading Shot Guns, Rifles, Pistols, Gun Material, Sporting Apparatus, Ammunition and Fishing Tackle,” ironically placed alongside of that for John R. Graham, a Frankfort undertaker and “Dealer in Metallic Burial Caskets and Cases, and Wooden Coffins and Coffin Furnishing Materials.” In addition to military surplus weapons, arms manufacturers marketed an array of smaller “pocket revolvers,” which provided more easily concealable multi-shot firepower.\footnote{Frankfort Commonwealth, June 8, 1866; Paducah Herald, August 4, 1866; Frankfort Kentucky Yeoman, February 22, 1867.}

The consequences of this surge in available firearms may be seen in two incidents chronicled in the Kentucky Yeoman. Apparently two Frankfort men had become embroiled in an ongoing feud, and so had adopted a policy of always going forth armed. On July 23 they
confronted each other on Market Street. The one named Nichols opened fire on his adversary, named Bridgeford, but missed with three shots from his revolver. Both men were arrested for a brief time in an attempt to calm them down, but they met again on Thursday, July 21, and this time at least one of them would die. During an exchange of gunfire, Nichols was mortally wounded and Bridgeford received a wound serious enough to require a leg amputation, with grim prospects for recovery. On August 22, the same editor reported an altercation in Lebanon involving a dispute over a shot of bourbon. An intoxicated potential buyer became upset over the price quoted him for another drink and lunged with a knife at the seller, who drew his revolver and fired. Both men received mortal wounds and quickly expired.15

As tumultuous and violent as life in parts of the Bluegrass had become by mid-1867, the counties in southern Kentucky may well have been even more unsettled. Samuel Martin, the Bureau agent in Glasgow, Barren County, asked the Military Department of Kentucky for a squad of twenty-five men to help him keep the peace during the summer election. He noted that citizens in his area had been intimidated during the national election the preceding year, and he anticipated a full-fledged “riot” during the August state election. He further noted the necessity of maintaining such a large garrison, as a smaller squad stationed at Glasgow had come under attack earlier in the year by a superior number of “rioters” who pelted them with stones and fired a sufficient number of shots so that the soldiers clearly understood they were not only outnumbered but outgunned. Martin noted that the garrison would have to be under good leadership to maintain proper discipline in the face of such organized and belligerent crowd actions. As evidence of the hostility that the local population held toward the federal

15 Frankfort Kentucky Yeoman, July 27 and August 22, 1867, respectively. The July 27 edition also contained a reprint of Harry’s report to the Louisville Courier regarding the killing of Bridgewater, whom Harry noted had been shot fifteen times by his assailants, even though the first shot, through the head, had probably instantly killed him.
government, Martin related an incident that had happened on the Fourth of July. On a day when “no celebration was indulged in” by the local white citizens, some soldiers took it upon themselves to fire a “small toy cannon on the corner of the square of town.” However, the soldiers were stopped by civil authorities who threatened to arrest them if they proceeded, as “it was contrary to the town laws to discharge fire arms upon the public square.” Additionally, a former soldier in the USCT who gave a speech at the local “Colored school” that evening received threats from “several white citizens” who vowed “to shoot him on sight.”

Individual citizens from these locales clearly stated the need of federal protection. A committee of citizens from Franklin, in Simpson County, wrote to the garrison commander begging him to remain in their town “to guard the jail, & protect the prisoners there confined, from escaping--and in view of the unsettled condition of the country, we think that the presence of you & your company, would have a tendency to preserve peace.” In particular, these citizens asked the garrison commander to remain not only through the election but at least until after their “September Court.” According to Lieutenant Maize, who already knew about the formal citizens’ petition that would be delivered to him, the Franklin jail held “three horse thieves and two train robbers, and the sheriff had requested a guard for them. He further noted, “There are a great many robbers and rascals in this vicinity that nothing but the presence of U. S. Troops prevent from committing outrages.”

Up in Maysville, C. J. True had his own rascals with which to contend. Toward the end of July he filed affidavits concerning violence and unrest in Mason County. Several freedwomen had been beaten up by white men, including a woman purportedly beaten for insulting the young

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16 Samuel Martin to Charles F. Johnson, July 11, 1867, LRDKY, Entry 2173, USACC, RG 393.
17 J. L. Stanford, Judge, Simpson County Court, to Lt. W. R. Maize, July 4, and W. R. Maize to W. F. Drum, July 3, 1867, both in LRDKY, Entry 2173, USACC, RG 393.
daughter of her assailant. He also reported an incident involving Harrison Mumford, a freedman who had been threatened with death for circulating a petition True had given him “asking Congress to enfranchise the negroes of Kentucky.” Mumford, who lived in Maysville, had been discussing the merits of the petition with several freedmen employed by the Hill House, when, according to his affidavit, Robert W. Purdy, a white man from Adams County, Ohio, happened by. Mumford stated that Purdy took the paper from him and began reading it aloud, for less than apparent reasons. Hearing a commotion outside of his establishment, Charles B. Hill, proprietor, emerged and demanded to know what was going on. Realizing what Purdy, who was unknown to Hill, had been reading, Hill flew into a rage and punched him twice in the face. The hapless Purdy, either just passing by or perhaps looking to make sport at the expense of Mumford, now staggered away toward the river as Hill continued to rail at him. Hill then turned on Mumford, demanding under penalty of death that Mumford leave the premises, or at least remove himself from “my pavement.” Mumford quickly walked a short distance away, but Hill continued to yell after him, at one point waving a knife and threatening to cut his throat if he did not leave. Finally, his rage spent for the moment, Hill went back inside.18

The Maysville Eagle, a Conservative Union newspaper, ran an article on this incident under the headline, “A Comedy of Errors.” The implication in the printed version is that Mumford was playing Purdy, an Ohio Democrat, for the fool by conniving to have him read such a petition in public. The article also related the fight which erupted later that afternoon in the Mayor’s Court between Hill and another resident of Maysville, Dr. Shackleford, with whom he had long been feuding. Hill wanted Mayor Cody “to permit his negro laborers to testify in the

18 C. J. True to R. E. Johnston, July 25, 1867, LRACO, Entry 1068, BRFAL-KY. Purdy also filed complaint against Hill, noting that he “struck me a blow in the face, and as I was leaving called me a damned abolitionist.”
case as they were his only witnesses.” The mayor, whom the newspaper called a “Radical,” apparently took great delight in upholding the letter of Kentucky law, thereby disallowing “negro testimony” in this case. Hill then turned to Purdy to try to convince him to consent to admitting such testimony, but Shackleford, who was accompanying Purdy, advised him against doing so. Hill accosted Schackleford, and in response Schackleford tried to hit Hill over the head with an “old arm chair.” The good doctor was fined five dollars and costs for his actions, but he got in a parting shot, calling Hill the “biggest rascal in Maysville.”

If, as appears to be the case, Ohioan Purdy was caught unawares in this incident, Harrison Mumford surely knew the risks of petitioning for the vote and organizing political conventions in Kentucky. Yet in the Commonwealth, as in other former slave states, black men and women risked greatly, including both loss of employment and loss of life or limb, as they formed political associations and made their voices heard. From January 1866 onward, freed people organized conventions at the state level and called upon local groups to meet, elect representatives, and participate in a process by which they hoped to address issues of civil and political rights. In the summer of 1867, many free black communities met to select delegates to

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19 Maysville Eagle, July 25, 1867.
a statewide meeting planned for November in Lexington. Additionally, Freedmen’s Bureau agents were actively circulating petitions throughout the Lexington Sub-district, encouraging “the most influential colored persons” in a given community to take an active part in getting signatures. Still, True noted that many “Freedmen refused to sign them, giving as a reason that they feared their churches and property would be destroyed by men who are opposed to their exercising the right of suffrage.”

Indeed, such activities did not go unnoticed, and Democratic editors, including S. I. M. Major of the Kentucky Yeoman, warned their readers of a sinister new threat in the form of a political alliance between freedmen and white Republicans.

Under the banner, “A Negro for Vice-President,” Major printed a letter warning that, if African Americans organizing in Virginia have their way, “the negro vote…will decide the [next] Presidential election. The negroes understand this perfectly and are laying their plans in accordance with it.” These plans, according to the report, included promotion of a black vice-presidential candidate” with the expectation that he would be nominated by the Republican Party and, in turn, duly elected to the office. A few days later, Major printed notices regarding “Match Games of Base Ball” between the Frankfort and Lexington clubs, a “Barbecue in Owen,” and a “Mammoth Cat Fish” that had been caught in the Kentucky River, alongside of not so subtle reminders of the consequences of Republican rule, including “It takes more money…to run the Freedmen’s Bureau than it did the whole Government under Jefferson” and “We learn…that four thousand voters have been registered in [Nashville]…Nine hundred are white and thirty-one hundred are colored.” Democratic newspapers in particular dwell on the alleged “reign of terror”

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22 C. J. True to R. E. Johnston, July 2, 1867, ULRLCS&SCO, Entry 1186, BRFAL-KY.
23 Major continued to serve as editor through the summer, but he was elected to state office in 1867 and so chose to hand over the editorial reins to the now legendary J. Stoddard Johnston.
in William G. “Parson” Brownlow’s Tennessee, as illustrated by a report to Haldeman’s Louisville Courier, reprinted by Major, which commented on, and condemned, “the riotous conduct of the negro militia” in the city of Franklin.  

Adding fuel to Democratic fires in Kentucky, on July 3, the nine U.S. congressmen from the Commonwealth, all Democrats, had been refused their seats and referred to the Committee on Elections. The rationale put forth by Congress was that Kentucky voters “have been overawed and prevented from a true expression of their will and choice at the polls by those who have sympathized or actually participated in the late rebellion.” As a result of this refusal, Democratic editors took full license to roll out every negative accusation or innuendo written or uttered during the war against federal and state authorities and reprint them as if they were well-known facts. They could not have asked for better political ammunition on the eve of Kentucky’s state election. Matters for the opposition were not aided by the fact that one of the nine, although a winner by the narrowest of margins and therefore ostensibly worthy of thorough investigation before being sworn in, had been a colonel in the Union Army. Congress tried to avoid further embarrassment by going ahead with his swearing in, but instead they only managed to undermine their initial claim to investigating voter intimidation and fraud, not loyalty.

At the heart of this issue, according to a report printed in veteran editor George D. Prentice’s Louisville Journal and reprinted by Major, was the perception in Congress that Kentucky, or at least large portions of it, had been disloyal to the Union during the war. Because of this disloyalty, Republicans deemed that aggressive action was needed to ensure that no representatives from districts that remained disloyal would be seated. In point of fact, election

24 Frankfort Kentucky Yeoman, June 27, June 30, and July 11, 1867, respectively.
tampering was a legitimate concern, given reports made by federal authorities concerning the level of violence and intimidation occurring in numerous Kentucky communities. But congressional rhetoric quickly moved from voter intimidation to disloyalty, and thus undermined the legitimacy of these refusals in the eyes of most Kentuckians. Loyalty may have been malleable in the Commonwealth during the war, but disloyalty, too, was often simply a matter of opinion, as was the case in the conflict between General Burbridge and Lieutenant Governor Jacob. For an overwhelming majority of Kentucky voters in 1864, being anti-Lincoln or anti-Republican had been a far cry from being pro-Confederate, and now many of these same voters adamantly refused to equate “loyal” with “Republican.” For their part, Democratic editors reasoned that the best possible response would be to enter “at the polls in August a protest so grand as to awe the recreant foe within, check the despotic foe without, and clarify the friends of constitutional liberty in every part of the land.”

For their part, Unionists and freed people alike remained gravely concerned as to what kind of justice they might hope to receive under the rule of “Rebel Democrats” elected to local offices. A major burden imposed on the Freedmen’s Bureau in Kentucky involved trying to determine the loyalty of seemingly endless lists of men. At La Grange, in Oldham County, Freedmen’s Bureau officials inquired as to the loyalty of the county judge. By way of reply, they received a brief but telling reference from a local Unionist, “during the war he was considered loyal. Since the close of the war, he has been voting with the Southern Party, (or the Rebel Democrats). In 1866 he was elected County Judge by that party, so you can arrive at your own conclusion in the matter.” E. H. Hobsbaum, a resident of Spencer County, was asked to confirm the loyalty of a “Mr. Clarke,” but could only reply, “I know nothing of his politicks,

26 Frankfort *Kentucky Yeoman*, July 18, 1867; Coulter, *Civil War and Readjustment*, 333-338.
though loyalty is scarce about here.” He quickly added, “I hope your not mistaken about my loyalty.” A Simpsonville resident commented on one neighbor, “I think he has been gentlemanly and respectful toward all parties, but his sympathies & his votes have been for such men as [Democratic candidates] Breckinridge, Duvall, & Helm, I believe.” Regarding another Anderson County neighbor, he noted with emphasis “he refuses to vote for the Rebel Democracy, hence I have always regarded him as a truly Loyal Man.”27

On the Saturday before the election, the Kentucky Yeoman again appealed to its loyal readers to do their duty, and in overwhelming numbers, as an act of protest against the actions of Radicals in Congress. To remind them of the alternative, Major printed a report titled “The Result in Tennessee”:

As no one doubted, the negroes had things their way in Tennessee on the 1st inst. At the farce on that day enacted in the State once honored as the home of Jackson, and in whose bosom now sleeps his bones—miscalled an election—Brownlow and his pimps were everywhere elected (?). With the white inhabitants expatriated and the negro race enfranchised, no one calculated upon any other result. Alas, for Tennessee! Her glory hath departed.28

Democrats needed a big turnout in order to prove that they represented the wishes and interests of an overwhelming majority of Kentuckians. A lighter turnout, even with a clear victory, might smack of voter intimidation. In truth, the opposition would not turn out in great numbers, as in some counties they had little in the way of candidates for whom to vote. In other counties, Regulator terror tactics had already assured easy victories. Thus Democrats in some locales had limited motivation for going to the polls, as their local results already were all but in the books.

27 Thomas Wells to R. W. Roberts, August 14; E. H. Hobsbaum to J. S. Gatlin, August 10; John W. Adams to J. S. Gatlin, August 12, 1867, respectively, with original emphasis, Unregistered Letters Received, Louisville Subassistant Commissioner’s Office (hereinafter cited as ULRLS&SCO), Entry 1209, BRFAL-KY.
28 Frankfort Kentucky Yeoman, August 3, 1867.
Still, editors turned to their readers’ understanding of race, particularly the deep-seated fear of Negro domination to motivate and agitate.29

With Kentucky’s Unionist Republicans and their potential free black allies functioning as the chief rivals of the Democrats in 1867, Governor Bramlette, Lieutenant Governor Jacob, and the tattered remnants of their Conservative Union supporters got caught in political no man’s land. Democrats who had remained loyal to the Union throughout the war, Bramlette and Jacob had nonetheless tried to resist federal policy when they deemed it detrimental to their constituents, as it seemed to be much of the time. Jacob had served as Bramlette’s anti-Lincoln speech-maker, had been arrested for his incendiary rhetoric, and in 1864, but for a reprieve from Lincoln himself, he was on his way to being exiled to the Confederacy. For Old Whig Unionists who now aligned themselves with the national Republican Party, both Bramlette and Jacob had waffled too much on wartime policy, had allowed too much anarchy among disgruntled slaveholders, and, in the end, simply had been Democrats all along. For the reunited state Democratic Party, however, Bramlette in particular had insufficiently resisted the Lincoln administration, thus he was culpable in allowing federal authorities, particularly Burbridge and Palmer, to make a mockery of state laws. Most significantly, Bramlette had failed utterly to protect the institution of slavery from being destroyed in Kentucky.30

Bramlette and Jacob, however, refused to give up, choosing instead to organize a Conservative Union Democratic third party ticket in hopes of recapturing the center tier of voters

29 Stephen Kantrowitz, Ben Tilman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 1-9. According to Kantrowitz, Tilman, a conservative Democrat in Jim Crow South Carolina, utilized the rhetoric of domination to mobilize white supremacists and mislead future generations as to the real meaning of racial violence, that is to say, that violence was not an expression of innate racism, per se, but a potent political tactic.30 Lowell H. Harrison and James C. Klotter, A New History of Kentucky (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 239-241.
that had gotten them elected in 1863. This party nominated Unionist William B. Kinkead of Lexington as its gubernatorial candidate and even asked the Democratic candidate, generally believed to have been a southern sympathizer and therefore likely to cause even more concern in Washington, to step aside and throw his support behind their man for the good of the state. Despite such dramatic appeals, neither the Conservative Unionists nor the Unionist/Republicans, who had nominated Colonel Sidney M. Barnes of Estill County, stood much of a chance against a Democratic ticket that, along with several known southern sympathizers, included one of John Hunt Morgan’s lieutenants.31

At the top of the Democratic ticket was an aging former governor and state senator, John L. Helm of Elizabethtown. Like many of his neutrality-supporting Democratic peers, Helm had sent a son to fight for, and indeed die for, the Confederacy. His identity as a probable wartime southern sympathizer who had sacrificed a son to the cause made him a nearly ideal candidate. The scope of the Democratic victory in 1867 was such that, in the words of the editor of the Kentucky Yeoman, this election had “made clear that, even though every Confederate were disenfranchised and every negro enfranchised, yet Radicalism [the Republican Party] cannot hope to succeed in Kentucky.” In other words, Major declared that “the result is glorious.”32 In this pivotal year, Democrats had not only orchestrated the defeat of the proposed ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment, but had also reelected their incumbent United States senator, former Whig and wartime Democrat Garrett Davis of Bourbon County. As previously mentioned, in special elections held in May, Democrats went nine for nine in winning the available seats for the United States House of Representatives. Only seven of these nine in the end would be seated, but this special election still constituted a substantive Democratic victory. With a

32 Frankfort Kentucky Yeoman, August 8, 1867.
landslide victory in August, Kentucky’s Democrats held the vast majority of the state firmly in their grip, capturing 31 of 38 seats in the state senate and 90 of 100 seats in the state house, along with the governorship and countless county-level offices.\(^{33}\)

Many of Kentucky’s black residents grew anxious as to their fate, as did defeated Unionists. In his August monthly report from Covington, John S. Graham noted that rural freed people from Kenton, Boone, and Grant counties were pouring into Covington, fearing their eminent re-enslavement. Graham expressed an opinion that “some low ignorant whites believe this to be true” as well. He noted that “The Union men also complain very bitterly and represented to me that they are living in a regular reign of terror.”\(^34\) Danville Unionist and Freedmen’s Bureau agent A. Benson Brown also had his hands full, particularly with a certain “Police Magistrate” whom he called “a notorious liar and demagogue.” Further, he noted with disdain that a murder case against a white man for killing a fourteen year old freedboy likely would be dropped as “a ‘trivial Nigger case’.” While despairing of the current social and political state of affairs in his district, “this blackest chaos that now reigns supreme (almost),” Brown remained optimistic about progress on other fronts. He had been referring numerous black couples to Lincoln and Rockcastle county courts for the purpose of having “their marriages recorded.” Lewis Landrum had reported to him that freed people in the vicinity of Stanford were busy hauling lumber for the purpose of building “themselves a church,” and that the Bureau, in conjunction with the American Missionary Association, was attempting to start a school. Finally, Brown reported that a large school was operating in Danville, three schools were operating in Harrodsburg, and a new school had opened its doors in Somerset, even if he had not

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\(^{33}\) Howard, *Black Liberation*, 146-152.

\(^{34}\) John S. Graham to John Ely, August 26, 1867, ULRLCS&CSCO, Entry 1186, BRFAL-KY.
yet succeeded in establishing such a school at Crab Orchard, where it was apparently sorely needed.  

In resignation to Kentucky’s new southern identity and no doubt embittered by the recent election, some Unionists went so far as to initiate an attempt to have several battle flags that had been carried by US regiments of Kentucky troops removed from the capitol building before the new, allegedly Confederate, administration came to town. The flags would be turned over to the federal government for safekeeping, rather than risk their desecration by this new regime. Dubbed “Much Ado About Nothing” by the Kentucky Yeoman, this incident nonetheless illustrates the frustration evident among many Unionists over this political turn of events. By reporting the incident at all, S. I. M. Major had an opportunity to appear magnanimous toward an enemy he had so vehemently railed against just days earlier, as well as to make a pitch for the reunion of those “brave and gallant sons of Kentucky who honestly believed themselves to be discharging a high and sacred duty, and who vindicated the honor and chivalry of the State upon every battle-field of the war.” That said, he also printed an editorial from the Louisville Journal that openly accused these concerned Union veterans of wanting to see Kentucky stripped of all her privileges and prerogatives and functions as a State, and subjected to the same sort of military and negro domination that exists in the South. They want our government taken out of the hands of the people and placed in the hands of the negroes and the Radicals. They do not think that she is fit to have control of her own flags, but are well persuaded that the negroes and Radicals, sustained by the Federal power, are exactly fit to have control of her. 

That this racially charged diatribe was delivered after such a landslide victory at the polls may seem surprising, but these statements have far more to do with establishing political legitimacy for the Helm administration than with electioneering. If the battle flag flap seemed

35 A. Benson Brown to John Ely, September 18, 1867, ULRLCS&CSCO, Entry 1186, BRFAL-KY.  
36 Frankfort Kentucky Yeoman, August 27, 1867, original emphasis.
trivial to some readers, they need only have read a bit further to find a reprint from the Lexington Observer regarding the “Black Commonwealths” now emerging in numerous former Confederate states. “State governments abolished; military despotism created, and the Constitution murdered,” decried the editor. “Negro juries sit in judgment in the courts,” and soon some black men “will be elected judges, sheriffs, clerks, constables, &c,” while “the most able, competent, and trustworthy of the whites are disfranchised.” The combined message was anything but subtle, and entirely focused on the fear of being ruled over, or dominated, by those who formerly had been white men’s slaves.37

On September 3, 1867, the ailing John L. Helm, unable to travel to Frankfort, was inaugurated in his Elizabethtown home as the duly elected governor of Kentucky. His inauguration marked a clear transition in the history of Kentucky on several levels. On the surface, his election signified the political triumph of a coalition of former Loyalist Democrats, southern sympathizers, and returning Confederates. That this coalition would quickly fragment into competing factions of Bourbons and New Departure Democrats mattered little at this point. With the ascendance of the Democratic Party, Kentucky’s Unionists, whether Conservatives or Republicans, ceased to mount any viable opposition. Only in the socially and economically troubled 1890s would a resurgent Republican Party next play a key role in state elections. In the meantime, the Commonwealth’s African-American population found itself at the tender mercies of those most bitter over emancipation and extension of civil rights to freed people.38

Helm’s predecessor, Thomas Bramlette, delivered an eloquent valedictory, emphasizing dangers that lay ahead for the Commonwealth and fully displaying his Democratic credentials. He began by noting that his successor had “been chosen, in accordance with the Constitution and

37 Ibid.
laws by the legal voters of Kentucky,” a very significant phrase given the state’s ongoing, combative relationship with Republicans in Congress. To the new governor, he warned of paying “the accustomed tribute which a censorious public expects” in the form of accepting “with great patient silence the abuse of the malevolent, the misconstruction of the careless, the misunderstanding of the ignorant, the misrepresentations of the partisan, and the slanders of the disappointed and unworthy.” After a bit of back-slapping in which he congratulated the “Union Democracy,” his own administration, for its fair and just policies at war’s end, Bramlette turned to the Regulator crisis. He tried to minimize it to a few counties, “where self-constituted ‘regulators’ disturb the peace and security of society.” He called on the “good and true men” of these counties to “promptly enforce the law against those lawless bands…and remove the reproach which is gathering around their name; and which is used by our enemies to cast discredit upon the whole State.” In short, Regulators were a local nuisance, not a state, and certainly not a national, crisis, and local authorities could handle the situation.39

The “enemies” to which Bramlette referred were the ongoing, though limited, federal military presence, the Freedmen’s Bureau, and the so-called Radical Party, or Kentuckians who now aligned themselves with the Republican Party. Helm now would have to combat these enemies by quelling the Regulators and thus demonstrating the lack of necessity for a federal presence in the Commonwealth. Further, he would have to face tremendous pressure from Congress regarding civil and political rights for Kentucky’s freed people. Bramlette delivered a sharp rebuke to Republicans, particularly those who, like Parson Brownlow, held high office in former Confederate states, claiming them to be men who subordinate every interest, mental, moral, and physical, public, private, and social, to their own base and inordinate thirst [to hold] office. This party, led on

39 Frankfort Kentucky Yeoman, September 5, 1867.
by these demagogues, propose to ‘reconstruct’ the governments of the Southern States, so as to enfranchise the negro and disfranchise the white men not of their party in those States. They hope thereby to build up a negro party in the South, which will perpetuate political power in their hands.40

Such a party would create political competition that would eventually “force a conflict of races” that could only lead to the extermination of the “weaker” race. Finally, he accused these “demagogues” of pretending that “it is only their purpose to ‘punish treason and protect loyalty,’” while “they make war upon our Constitutional Union more ruthlessly, but with less manly courage, than did those whom they would punish.” He concluded this passage by openly proclaiming, “We can respect the manhood of those who, though erring in purpose and in judgment, struck boldly and bravely for separating the Southern States into an independent government,” but “we have no respect for those who pervert the powers of a free government” in order to accomplish “the destruction of the rights and the liberties of the Southern white men.”41

In his final speech as governor, Bramlette, it would seem, had truly become what numerous Republican detractors had called him over the last two years: a southern Democrat.

In the week following the inauguration, reports circulated as to the very poor health of the new governor, who had not even been able to deliver his own inaugural address. On September 10, the editor of the Kentucky Yeoman wrote, “It becomes my mournful duty to announce the death of his Excellency John L. Helm, which sad event took place at his residence near Elizabethtown at half-past 12 o’clock on the 8th inst.” With Helm’s death, Lieutenant Governor John W. Stevenson took over as acting governor, but not for the full term. He would serve until such time as an election could be held, the winner of which would finish out Helm’s original four-year tenure. Not missing a beat, and right alongside of his eulogy of Helm, the editor of the

40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
Yeoman reprinted a scathing attack on “Negro Suffrage” and the so-called “Sumner negro programme” designed to finish “the work of Africanizing the South.” Borrowed from the New York Herald, this article warned that imposing “negro suffrage upon the loyal States, whether the people wish it or not,” would be next on the agenda of “Sumner, Wendell Phillips, and some others.” Though perhaps not the first step on the path to “Negro domination” Democrats claimed it to be, black suffrage certainly would be a crucial step toward providing freed people in Kentucky a reasonable opportunity to secure their basic civil rights at the local level, including at least some measure of protection under the law.

One great irony of the fiery, racially charged rhetoric printed by Kentucky’s Democratic editors in 1867 is that it contained a kernel of truth. A broad-based movement was afoot, as they well knew, to extend the franchise to freedmen in loyal states, including Kentucky, and such a turn of events would lead to a new political landscape at the local level, at least in theory. In Bluegrass counties with substantive free black populations, the franchise could mean much more competitive elections, particularly for local offices. Not that these counties would immediately be electing a black sheriff, but black votes could lead to Democratic political defeat at the local level. In fear over this possibility, and too zealously looking to exact a measure of retribution on old political and military adversaries, Democrats certainly did their part in failing to address the Regulator crisis. Indeed, some Regulators quickly were going legitimate in their counties as they ran for and got elected to local office, particularly those of sheriff or constable. Over the next several decades, Kentucky, like the rest of the South to which it now belonged, would pay a

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42 Frankfort Kentucky Yeoman, September 10, 1867.
43 See Kathleen M. Blee and Dwight B. Billings, “Violence and Local State Formation: A Longitudinal Case Study of Appalachian Feuding,” Law & Society Review (1996): 671-705, for a discussion of the role of violence in establishing political control at the local level in a Kentucky county, as well as the social and economic benefits of maintaining such control.
high price for at least tacitly condoning politically-motivated, post-emancipation community violence and for rewarding perpetrators of violence with political office.44

Upon conducting a thorough inspection of his district, A. Benson Brown eloquently spoke to this “unhappy state of affairs” in the southern Bluegrass Region. Of Boyle County, he wrote that, out of a white population of about 2500, “Danville has about 50 Union White Men who are not only anxious to aid the Freedman in his present desperate struggle for liberty, and life, but are already in the means of quietly rendering their material assistance, and advice. But this force is insufficient for any general movement to influence a change in the local procedure bearing upon the Freedmen.” This “procedure” involved “unjust laws, and inhuman prejudices existing and continually felt by them on account of the Rebel element, a large majority of these people not having been whipped in the late War.” Likewise, he commented on neighboring Perryville:

It is to me an unaccountable fact that I should find in Perryville men who are loud in their protestations of loyalty who voted the Union ticket and yet are the very leaders of gangs of “Regulators” or “Banditti,” so that civil law is a nullity, but as the fighting is mainly between the whites, and so far as I can hear the Blacks are seldom injured, I have no cause to investigate this unhappy state of affairs, further than to stigmatize this new Rebellion against law and order but an outcropping of the first. This “Lynch” law has of late overthrown the civil law, and caused the almost whole destruction of the old judicial tribunals—how they can justify such Rebellion, I cannot understand.45

Brown’s district also included Mercer, Lincoln, and Rockcastle counties. Regarding Lincoln, he concluded, “This County is the grand center around which revolves and from which

45 A. Benson Brown to R. E. Johnston, October 10, 1867, ULRLCS&CSCO, Entry 1186, BRFAL-KY.
emanates the flying embers which have fired this Section into demonic Rebel fury.” He noted the recent burning of two “colored School houses” and the fact that freed people dare not try to acquire property on which to build others. Small schools could and did operate, but attempts to organize large ones had been met with violent resistance. Finally, Brown commented on “the most wicked murder” of Bridgewater and cited Crab Orchard as headquarters of area Regulators. He concluded that “here they hold high carnival, and now here they pounce upon their unsuspecting Union victims wherever certain they can strike them in the back.”

A Baptist minister preaching in Lincoln County in 1867 similarly observed that in the southern Bluegrass, “the waves of passion that had been raised so high by the winds of war, had not yet subsided.” Elder W. H. Stewart, who had been raised a Quaker in Ohio, had converted to the Baptist persuasion and become something of an itinerate preacher and school teacher, traveling through Kentucky, Arkansas, Virginia, and elsewhere before finding himself in Louisiana in the midst of civil war and reconstruction. He decided to visit old friends in the Commonwealth, hoping the situation farther south would improve by the time he returned. What he found in Lincoln and surrounding counties left him almost speechless: “What malice! What deep-seated rancor! What hatred of each other! I will not attempt to describe it, for language would fail me. It can never be described.” And yet he continued to try: “The fire that had been nursed within, was ready to be fanned into a flame, and to burst out like a volcano, destroying every thing within its reach. I saw the danger, and trembled at the consequences.” Sadly, too few of his listeners seemed to have understood the dangers, nor did they appear to tremble at the consequences, of the actions of militant white supremacists in their midst. Whatever their motivations or their psychological predispositions, the actions of Regulators, Judge Lynch’s

46 Ibid.
men, and other so-called vigilantes wrought havoc on their communities and begat a legacy of racial violence and political assassination with which Kentucky struggles to this day. The Reverend Stewart rightly “trembled at the consequences” of this long season of post-emancipation mayhem.47

In the summer of 1867, the Cincinnati Enquirer had rallied to the aid of its Democratic sisters south of the Ohio in trying to downplay the Regulator crisis. On July 11, the editor printed a correspondent’s report on “‘Regulators’ So-called vs. Thieves, Robbers and Bushwhackers,” in which the author presented the argument that the real problem in Kentucky was the break-down of law and order as a result of the leniency and corruption of the Bramlette administration. In this morass of moral decay, Judge Lynch’s court had righteously emerged to restore order, only to be condemned as lawless by the same ineffectual authorities responsible for this sad state of affairs. As a result, true lawlessness prevailed in the form of “robbers [who] band themselves into regulator organizations for the purpose of despoiling honest people.” In conclusion, the correspondent demanded that “The shameless wretch who will speak in denunciation of Judge Lynch’s ‘moral suasion’ upon those whom the community has branded as robbers and knows to be such, he should have the word robber accomplice burnt into his forehead with a hissing red hot iron.”48

Pre-election attempts to lend legitimacy to Regulator violence aside, following their landslide victory, Kentucky’s Democrats had to make at least a minimal effort to live up to the rhetoric of their “law and order” campaign. On September 20, 1867, Governor Stevenson wrote

47 Stewart, W. H., Reminiscence of Elder W. H. Stewart, with Sketches and Skeletons of His Sermons (Jackson, Miss.: ?, 1894), 30, in W. H. Stewart Reminiscences (Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill).
48 Cincinnati Enquirer, July 11, 1867.
to General George Thomas, whose military district contained Kentucky, assuring him that the Commonwealth had sufficient resources to guard its own jails without the presence of federal troops. The Bath County jail in question contained a prisoner named Moxley, and his fate was of momentous concern to the local judge, who had asked for federal assistance. Given events throughout the summer, Stevenson’s assertions seemed hollow, indeed. On the day Helm had been inaugurated, the Kentucky Yeoman had run the story of several recent lynchings, as originally printed in the Danville Kentucky Advocate. A worker named Hicks had been hanged by “some unknown persons” in the vicinity of Hustonville. Furthermore, a prisoner at the Harrodsburg jail, accused of raping a girl in Washington County, had been forcibly removed by a mob and hanged about four miles outside of town. This account of the inadequate protection afforded by local jails is in keeping with concerns expressed by numerous federal officers.

On September 1, Martin Norton wrote that he had rounded up a couple of suspects with connections to a Regulator band operating south of Danville near the community of Parksville. This group of twenty or so had lynched the aforementioned Hicks in late August, and they had left behind a witness who, though sworn to secrecy, might be convinced to testify against them. No sooner had the potential witness been brought into custody, along with a second man connected to the gang, than one citizen of Danville publicly stated that he would kill the prisoners “as he got a chance.” Norton clearly indicated that such an attack would be for the purpose of silencing the man he hoped to convince to testify. He quickly made arrangements to remove him to Louisville, and in doing so, he lamented, “I have everything to combat. I am surrounded by spies who watch my every action, the whole county is banded together with a very few

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49 J. W. Stevenson, Gov., to Genl. Thomas, September 20, 1867, LRDKY, Entry 2173, USACC, RG 393.
50 Frankfort Kentucky Yeoman, September 3, 1867.
exceptions.” Regarding his reluctant witness, he pledged to “bring every effort to bear upon this man to make him divulge” the names of the Regulators, but conceded “the truth is, men dare not tell what they know—as, if known, that they did so, their lives would not be worth much.” Once again, Norton conceded that he was outnumbered and outgunned, “There is no question as to the strength of these outlaw bands, the rich and the poor are combined together and money is spent profusely when needed to accomplish their villainous ends.” By all appearances, Norton not only had encountered but also had rightly discerned the nature of the “good and true men” of Boyle County on whom Democrats had relied for political support.

By mid-1867, Kentucky’s unconditional Unionists and fledgling Republicans had found themselves strangers in their own neighborhoods as former Confederates and their anti-federal allies quickly gained political control over much of the Commonwealth. Partisan editors dictated the Democratic Party line by portraying Unionists as malcontents, subversives, and even common outlaws, making it clear that the deaths of such desperados as Bridgewater were necessary if law and order were to return to Kentucky. In the state election of 1867, Democrats had overwhelmingly defeated Unionists, due in large measure to widespread political violence and intimidation, as well as through the use of racially charged rhetoric designed to spread fear among voters concerned about the consequences of black equality. Once unleashed, neither political nor racial violence could be restrained. The reign of terror conservative Democrats had condoned in the first months and years after emancipation now escalated beyond their ability to control, reaching levels of intensity and brutality that must have made even some wartime southern sympathizers blanch.

51 Martin Norton to Benjamin P. Runkle, September 1, 1867, LRDKY, Entry 2173, USAAC, RG 393.
Chapter Eight

“Colored people had just as well tramp for the North”:

Kentucky’s Zenith of Racial Violence, 1868-1871

Despite an overwhelming victory in 1867, conservative Democrats failed to achieve political legitimacy in large measure due to their leaders’ inability to rein in Regulators, who seemingly targeted anyone and everyone standing in the way of their local agendas. Indeed, Governor Stevenson presided over a state plagued by racial and social violence, notwithstanding his many rhetorical attempts to minimize its scope and scale. He and his allies, with Regulators sometimes serving as their shock troops, effectively thwarted federal attempts to enable freed people to experience the freedom accorded them by Reconstruction legislation, culminating in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. But during this process, which constituted a rehearsal for the process by which the former Confederate states would “redeem” themselves from Reconstruction governments, white supremacists alienated leading Kentuckians such as John Marshall Harlan. Though they remained loyal to the party, even former Confederates turned Democratic editors Henry Watterson and William C. P. Breckinridge called on Kentuckians to accept the Reconstruction amendments and extend some rights to freed people so as to hasten the day when the federal government would cease trying to interfere in what Democrats deemed local and state issues. Still, white supremacists refused to yield, especially regarding resistance to efforts to admit black testimony against white defendants in state courts.¹

In spite of ongoing racial violence, in late 1867 the head of the Freedmen’s Bureau in Kentucky reported that freed people typically were “industrious, honest, law abiding” workers, if “humanely treated and promptly paid.” Further, almost a hundred schools were in operation, though many more were needed, and the Bureau hospital in Louisville met at least some of the needs of the thousands upon thousands of freed people in the area. But with word rapidly spreading that the Bureau would be disbanded in 1868, many black Kentuckians took to the roads, hoping to start over in what they hoped would be more friendly climes. Though many left the state, many more moved into towns and cities, seeking to escape the night-riding marauders in the countryside and perhaps find strength in numbers within black urban communities. W. C. P. Breckinridge, who as editor of the Lexington Observer and Reporter argued in favor of basic rights for freed people but by no means racial equality, summarized the challenge black Kentuckians faced when he declared: “We want a white man’s State and we intend to have it.”

In January 1868 Kentucky Freedmen’s Bureau Assistant Commissioner Sidney Burbank penned a lengthy reply to Oliver Otis Howard, his superior in Washington, in response to a circular Howard had issued in December that proposed the disbanding of the Bureau in Kentucky in early 1868. Choosing his words with care, Burbank was quick to assert that his report was “not submitted as a protest or remonstrance against your Official actions.” Rather, he sought to provide the Freedmen’s Bureau Commissioner with “a simple statement of reasons founded upon indisputable facts” as to why Howard’s planned scale-back “should not be carried into effect if it

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2 Sidney Burbank to O. O. Howard, October 10, 1867, reel 49, Registers and Letters Received by the Commissioner of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872, National Archives Microfilm Publication M752 (hereinafter cited as R&LRC, BRFAL, [M752]).
4 Lexington Observer and Reporter, January 4, 1868.
can possibly be avoided.” Howard had asked for feedback as to the impact of his circular, and Burbank certainly obliged. He all but accused his superior of undoing any progress made by the Bureau in the previous year, particularly concerning efforts to use the United States Courts as leverage in forcing Kentucky “to grant the Freedmen the right to testify in her Courts of justice.”

Before the circular, “the feeling of the people toward the Freedmen was gradually growing better, day by day.” But once Howard’s intent became common knowledge, thanks to the press, attitudes once again hardened, with the result that the circular was “heralded through the State as the triumph of democratic principles, and the death blow of the Bureau. Its effect has been to embolden the rebel element and to renew their persecutions of the Freedmen.”

Burbank then lashed out at the “public journals” of Kentucky, about which he noted that “ninety percent of the press in this State is opposed to the Bureau; radically opposed to everything having in view the protection and elevation of the Freed-people.” He concluded that “the Press of the State truly represents the feelings of the people,” and that it “matters little” whether the press simply reflected public opinion or actually served to mold it. “The public press fans the flame and the fire of hate grows brighter and fiercer,” with the end result that both newspapers and their readership looked joyously to the possibility that “on the 15th day of February [1868] the obnoxious Bureau emissaries and spies are to be sent out of the State. They pronounce this a victory over the General Government and the end of the efforts of Congress to give the Freedmen any protection or rights other than is conferred by the State laws of Kentucky.” Indeed, Burbank noted that “in many parts of the State the rebels openly declare” their intention not only to deny freed people rights, but also to punish the former slave “for the many times he has already appealed to the Bureau and Courts for aid.”

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5 Sidney Burbank to O. O. Howard, January 13, 1868, reel 53, R&LRC, BRFAL, (M752).
report his own assessment of the deteriorating state of affairs in the Commonwealth, Burbank quoted extensively from several sources, one a black resident of Nelson County and the others federal officers working for the Bureau.\textsuperscript{6}

In a letter sent to Burbank by “a Colored Man” residing in Bardstown, the author described in detail “the feelings of the people of this State.” The freedman noted that “signs seem to indicate that terror is at hand. It seems to me that they (meaning the whites) are just waiting for the time to come for the Bureau to be moved out of Kentucky.” At this point the freedman recounted the story of “a Colored Soldier” who had been arrested, only to be removed from the Bardstown jail by a crowd, which then “stripped him and cut his privates off and then made him run from the Catholic Church to the Bridge about ½ mile in that condition then made him stand on the abutment and shot him off.” The black veteran fell “about thirty feet” to the creek below, where he was found “next morning—dead—in a horrible condition.” In summing up the plight faced by freed people, the Bardstown resident concluded that, “If the Bureau is not kept here in Kentucky the Colored people had just as well tramp for the North.”\textsuperscript{7}

Confirming his assessment were several regular army officers working with the Bureau in Kentucky who, according to Burbank, “have no personal interest in the continuance of the Bureau.” Brevet Lieutenant Colonel R. E. Johnston of the Lexington Sub-district concluded that “there are thousands of evil disposed persons who hate the Negroes but will never disturb them while the Bureau is in existence in the District,” though “others there are who less prudent have already begun their devilish work of whipping and outraging the defenseless blacks.” He noted that establishing Freedmen’s schools had been difficult enough with Bureau support, and “not a school I believe could be kept open twenty days after the Bureau would cease to lend its

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.
protection, influence and support.” Johnston noted that in many cases freed people had been unable, or unwilling due to fear of reprisals from locals, to establish schools even with Bureau help, and in much of his district Howard’s “Circular Letter has stopped the work on schools in every place.”\(^*^8\) Similar reports came in from other parts of the Commonwealth.

Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Isaac S. Catlin of the Louisville Sub-district noted of the circular, “Upon the work of establishing Schools so far as I can judge it has already been prejudicial.” He noted that the Reverend Mr. Ramsdell, a Bureau agent, had “met with very serious opposition, especially in Taylorsville in Spencer Co. where his life was threatened.” He concluded,

This letter undoubtedly has had the effect to embolden the opponents of the Bureau and its educational policy, as it has been universally published in the State and commented upon in terms of triumph by papers hostile to the Acts of Congress securing protection and civil rights to Freedmen. It is received by leading journals as the death-blow to the Bureau and an end to military interference with the affairs of the State.\(^*^9\)

Catlin would have his hands full in 1868 as he now would be responsible for supervising Bureau operations in southern and western counties as well as those he already supervised.

Burbank cautioned his superiors that withdrawal of the Bureau from the Bluegrass would severely impede all efforts to educate freed people in that region and secure their civil rights. Further, he argued that such efforts would stop altogether in the southern and western counties of Kentucky if the Bureau were removed. He noted that in Hardinsburg, in Breckenridge County, a Freedmen’s school “was blown up by powder.” William Taylor, the African American who had been teaching at the school, reported “that the ‘Regulators’ had said that the Bureau had been removed from Ky. and that they would drive the ‘damned niggers’ from the State.” In Daviess

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\(^*^8\) Ibid.
\(^*^9\) Ibid.
and other counties, reports indicated that attempts to set up schools had been thwarted by threats to burn down any school buildings “as soon as the Bureau goes away.” Noting that “it is useless to multiply words, such is the testimony from all portions of the State,” Burbank concluded that “removal of the Bureau will effectually stop all schools for Freedmen.” He proudly stated, indeed overstated, that the Bureau in Kentucky “has been a terror to Guerillas and Regulators and if once removed, their unbridled malice will have no curb.”\textsuperscript{10} In the end, such protests succeeded in keeping the Bureau active in the Commonwealth throughout 1868, but by the end of that year it was swiftly being dismantled.\textsuperscript{11}

With the Bureau’s status thus in limbo, organized bands of white men continued to oppose gatherings of freed people, going so far as to attack churches, even with religious meetings in progress. In November 1867, a band had entered a Georgetown church, pistols drawn, and “in Shameful and Scandalous manner interrupted the minister during the services.”\textsuperscript{12} In this case, little damage was done and local authorities made several arrests. In July 1868, however, a church in Midway, between Lexington and Frankfort, was severely damaged by a band of white men. In the process of breaking out the windows and wrecking the interior, numerous shots were fired, several of which inflicted injuries on bystanders. Within black communities, churches served as far more than spaces for religious meetings. They were community gathering places, sites for political rallies, and in many cases the actual buildings in which Freedmen’s schools were housed. As such, church buildings, members, and ministers

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} R. E. Johnston to Benjamin P. Runkle, November 30, 1867, Letters Received, Assistant Commissioner’s Office (hereinafter cited as LRACO), Entry 1068, Kentucky District, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105 (hereinafter cited as BRFAL-KY) (National Archives, Washington, D.C.).
came under attack by white supremacists attempting to impose social and political control over a given community’s black population. Further, ongoing attacks on black communities, churches, and schools in the heart of the Bluegrass clearly demonstrated the extent to which local and state authorities had little ability, or perhaps little will, to suppress Regulators.\textsuperscript{13}

Like churches and ministers, in 1868 numerous schools and especially their teachers came under attack. In February Isaac S. Catlin reported to his superior that “the Teacher whom you directed me to teach the Freedmen’s school at New Castle, Kentucky was mobbed and driven out of Town shortly after reaching his destination.” In April reports from Lincoln County indicated continued problems with attempts to establish and maintain a school at Crab Orchard, noting of the assigned teacher: “Ever since he has been there, white children have habitually cursed and stoned him.” The same month in Danville a group of citizens ran off the teacher of a Freedmen’s school.\textsuperscript{15} In nearby Madison County, where John G. Fee had reopened Berea College as a biracial institution and was now educating some 306 students, of which two-thirds were black, reports stated that Regulators had been “whipping Negroes etc & have took one white man & hung him to a limb & have threatened to hang more & whip Negroes & Burn Beareah to Ashes.”\textsuperscript{16}

Attacks on rural communities drove still more freed people from farm and field into Kentucky’s urban centers, if not immediately across the river to Ohio and Indiana. In January 1868 C. J. True reported from Maysville that “there seems to be a disposition on the part of a

\textsuperscript{14} Isaac S. Catlin to Thomas K. Noble, February 27, 1868, LRACO, Entry 1068, BRFAL-KY.
\textsuperscript{15} H. G. Thomas to Benjamin P. Runkle, April 13, 1868, LRACO, Entry 1068, BRFAL-KY.
\textsuperscript{16} Andrew True and Robert Fish to General George H. Thomas, April 14, 1868, LRACO, Entry 1068, BRFAL-KY.
considerable number [of freedmen] to avoid entering into contracts for an extended period, preferring to seek odd jobs…Many have moved into the city with their families with the expectation of getting work here.” As a result, “the supply” proved to be “greater than the demand in the city,” and thus numerous black men and women could not find work. To keep the peace and placate white residents complaining of the growing numbers of freed people “standing around the market house and street corners,” True proposed sending around a circular “advising them to find homes in the country, and threatening to arrest them as vagrants if they do not find employment without unnecessary delay.” The next month, however, True noted, “Reports of outrages upon the persons and property of Freedmen frequently reach this office from the interior counties,” and that the Bureau had been unsuccessful at placing agents in several counties due to the animosity of locals. In June, he reported that a freedman, William Warner, had been attacked and badly beaten in Robertson County by “three men (to him unknown)” while returning home “from a neighboring farm house.”17 Little wonder, then, that the streets of Maysville became crowded not with vagrants or idle hands but with refugees from the countryside.

Even as they sought to combat perpetrators of racial violence, Bureau agents retained certain prejudicial attitudes toward freed people, and they continued to impose their Victorian middle-class values on black Kentuckians. H. C. Howard of the Lexington Sub-district reported that freedmen in his district were “not…inclined to enter into contracts by the year, and are too much disposed to seek the small Towns, too much idling and demoralization among them in regard to the Obligations of Virtue and Chastity.” He further observed that “the increase of children by indiscriminate intercourse is producing poverty and degradation requiring protection

17 C. J. True to R. E. Johnston, January 26, 1868; February 25, 1868; June 25, 1868, all in Unregistered Letters Received, Lexington Chief Superintendent and Chief Subassistant Commissioner’s Office (hereinafter cited as ULRLCS&CSCO), Entry 1186, BRFAL-KY.
and attention from the Bureau to prevent starvation.” He encouraged strong punishment for “adultery and abandonment,” and lamented the extent to which “the Freedmen do not regard the moral obligation of the Rites of Matrimony.”

Both True’s and Howard’s concerns reflect what the Bureau referred to as a “war on dependency,” that is, efforts to decrease as swiftly as possible the number of freed people who required government relief to survive. Underlying this policy was the assumption that “providing blacks with aid from the federal government too easily…would contribute to black idleness and license.” Thus the Bureau pushed freed people toward economic self-sufficiency with all due haste. Agents frequently used threat of prosecution for vagrancy in their efforts to force able-bodied freedmen “who could not find employment to move to areas where work was more plentiful.” On the other hand, unemployed freedwomen, even the able-bodied, typically were regarded as “dependents on the government” and not vagrants. In order to reduce the number of these dependents, the Bureau worked “to assist black women in holding black men accountable for their responsibilities as husbands and fathers.” At the same time, agents “regularly reminded black men of these duties” in their efforts to foster a sense of “manly independence and responsibility.” In making these efforts, agents at times seemed oblivious to the maelstrom of abuse, terror, and poverty in which most former slaves were caught.

Freed people continued to flock to the towns and cities of Kentucky through the end of the decade, hoping for a better life, or at least looking to put distance between themselves and former masters. By 1870, Lexington had so many black residents that their numbers nearly

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18 H. C. Howard to R. E. Johnston, February 25, 1868, ULRLCS&CSCO, Entry 1186, BRFAL-KY.
equaled white Lexington residents, while rural Fayette County had lost nearly a third of its black population. This flood of new residents brought tremendous hardship to Kentucky’s cities, as previously noted, but also provided opportunities for landholders, carpenters, and others to profit from this demographic shift by developing new, almost exclusively black, neighborhoods or “towns” separated from the older residential areas. That these neighborhoods, sometimes little more than shantytowns built for mostly impoverished residents, lay on the least hospitable, and therefore least valuable, parcels of land almost goes without saying. In Lexington, residential segregation very quickly became the norm, with most whites living in the older residential areas in the city center and most blacks living in outlying areas. Typically, black men worked as factory workers, laborers, or farm hands, while women worked as domestic servants and laundresses. Within such communities, antebellum free men of color “virtually monopolized the leading positions in black social, political, and educational organizations” and stood a better chance of economic success than newly emancipated rural freedmen.

These new free black communities proved to be a cause for concern among many white Kentuckians. Writing to Kentucky sculptor Joel Tanner Hart, his “Dear & long remembered friend” now living in Florence, Italy, a Bourbon County resident attempted to describe the transformation of Kentucky society the Civil War had wrought. Noting first and foremost that “the Infamos Yankey” had set up shop in the state in the form of “Tax Collectors Clerks Whiskey gagers Inspectors Still House watchers” and more, Ged M. Layson complained bitterly about the new federal tax system and the ongoing presence of federal troops and officials, “notwithstanding the war has closed near three years since so to speak.” Then he thought “It might be of some interest to you in a foreign Land to know what had become of the African race

in our Negro loving Country.” He noted that emancipation had become law in Kentucky “on the 18th day of Dec 1865,” and that freed people “were generally jubilant over the rich blessing bestowed on them by the President of the United States.” Layson observed that “It seems to be a part of their nature as is the case with the wild dog to go to town or to live in town or towns.” He lamented that “the Suburbs of all our Towns are more or less built up with…huts. I believe about half of the population of Paris & Lexington both are blacks.” He noted the building of “two towns that are exclusively negro in the Suburbs of Paris.” Citing the poor condition of these black urban-dwellers, Layson concluded, “the very large majority of them would be better off if they were Slaves with there old masters.” He defended this argument by stating, “There is no people upon earth that cares so much for the African race in our country as those who were formerly slave owners and there is no people that will ever know so much about them as their former masters do.” Finally, he echoed the widely held belief that the destitute “could get work at fair wages if they would work,” but that “so many of them prefer to be idle.”

Regarding this transition from slavery to free labor in the Commonwealth, Marion Lucas has noted that “the enormity of the economic problems facing black Kentuckians required bold and innovative solutions,” of which but few were forthcoming. The ever-active John G. Fee proposed establishment of employment agencies and recruitment among northern entrepreneurs in order to secure work for freed people, and Louisville city leaders even proposed recruiting skilled white workers and artisans to teach black men their trades. With little or no government support for such plans, black leaders took the initiative and in 1869 established their own employment agency. They also encouraged freed people to take what jobs they could find as “artisans or agricultural workers.” In the end, however, most black men and women simply “had

21 Ged M. Layson, from near Millersburg, Ky., to Joel T. Hart, September 24, 1868, Joel Tanner Hart Papers [Filson Historical Society, Louisville (hereinafter cited as FHS)].
to solve the problem of employment on an individual basis,” all the while combating “rumors that they were undependable workers.”

Freed people trying to survive in the countryside faced equal and sometimes greater prejudice, as well as racial violence at the hands of night riders. Desperate workers often agreed to whatever terms white landholders would give them, which included working for shares, contracting as a wage laborer, or, in the case of children, signing on as an apprentice. Because these contracts frequently “were verbal agreements, with only white witnesses,” black laborers had difficulty receiving fair treatment. The undermanned Bureau, in its efforts to maintain good relations between white landholders and black farm workers, proved ambiguous in handling complaints. In particular, agents grew frustrated with black workers who either failed to meet their contractual obligations or who refused to agree to long-term (generally one year) contracts. When physical altercations occurred between employer and employee, black laborers had little recourse other than the Bureau, as Kentucky obstinately refused to permit black witnesses to testify in state courts in cases involving white defendants.

Following his inauguration, Governor Stevenson immediately had taken steps designed to give the appearance that he was a “law and order” governor. First, he issued a proclamation that all Regulator groups should immediately disband. But down in Marion County a fight broke out between Regulators and a similarly organized group opposing them. Stevenson then called out the state militia, sending Adjutant General Frank Wolford and three companies of troops to the southern Bluegrass. As they had done so many times in the face of federal troops, the Regulators simply vanished, resuming their normal lives until such time as the coast should be clear to

23 Ibid., 270-273.
resume their terror campaign. Even in the face of such embarrassment for his administration, Stevenson bowed to the will of most of his constituents and refused to support any change in Kentucky law regarding black testimony for most of his tenure as governor.24

For its part, the General Assembly had met in December 1867 and set about the important state business of passing “resolutions calling for an end to southern reconstruction, the maintenance of a ‘White man’s government’ in the South,” and an investigation of the actions of General Burbridge during his time as commander of the Department of Kentucky.25 Further, conservative Democrats had handily defeated a bill that would have granted black testimony. Such was their influence that, when state Democrats met in convention in January 1868, the party made no mention of black testimony in its platform, other than emphasizing that “questions concerning suffrage and testimony were exclusively within the jurisdiction of the state.”26 Acting Governor Stevenson would have to stand for election that year, and Democrats had no intention of appearing to compromise with Radicals in the state and especially in Congress.

Federal officials empowered by the Civil Rights Act of 1866 had tried to circumvent this issue by imposing federal jurisdiction over cases in which the state refused to hear black witnesses, and in October 1867 the United States Circuit Court of Kentucky had upheld the constitutionality of this practice. At this point, even conservative Democrats such as Walter Haldeman openly opined that the Commonwealth should allow black testimony, as that would be less offensive than having the issue forced upon white Kentuckians by federal courts. The logic of Haldeman’s argument appears to have been lost on his fellow Democratic editors in 1867.

thus by 1868 the federal district court in Kentucky had assumed jurisdiction over all cases in which black witnesses had been denied the right to testify.27

Under the prosecutorial efforts of Benjamin H. Bristow, the United States Circuit Court had convicted nine white men by July 1868 and had fifteen others under indictment.28 As a resident of Lincoln County wrote to her brother in Louisville, “I suppose you have heard of the death of Mr. Steve Burdett. General of our citizens have been indicted in your city and have to appear at the October court to answer the charge of being Lynch’s men, among them number your old friends, Jim Denny, F. Peacock, John Salter & others.” Her concern was not over the murders of Burdett and other white men in her area, but over the fact that now the local men accused of such crimes would be hauled before the Circuit Court to face charges.29 Still, even when federal authorities could identify Regulators and have them arrested, conviction was never a given. As R. E. Johnston noted in relation to the destruction of a Freedmen’s school in Midway, “I examined a large number of witnesses, both white and black, and I regret to say that I was unable to prove anything against them for the reason that the night was very dark and the witnesses were unable to identify any of the above named party as having committed any such act…I moved that the prisoners be discharged, and it was accordingly so ordered.”30

Additionally, the federal court soon had “a burden of cases so great as to be impossible to process,” and only the most serious offenses, including murder, physical assault (excluding rape, in most cases), and damage to property, were tried.31 Further, the practice of using federal authorities to make initial arrests based on violations of the Civil Rights Act proved to be equally

28 A. J. Ballard to Benjamin P. Runkle, July 9, 1868, LRACO, Entry 1068, BRFAL-KY.
29 Gertrude Pettus to Joseph Pettus, July 10, 1868, Pettus-Speiden Family Papers, FHS.
30 R. E. Johnston to J. P. Collins, August 4, 1868, LRACO, Entry 1068, BRFAL-KY.
problematic. Many Freedmen’s Bureau officials were also military personnel, and federal authorities did not want to give the appearance that civilians in Kentucky were being arrested by the army. Therefore numerous civilian federal commissioners were appointed who in turn could deputize military personnel to assist in making arrests. Officials in Stanford, Danville, and Lebanon reported much confusion over this policy, and they continued to face a situation in which they were outnumbered, outgunned, and, frankly, outwitted on most occasions.32

The limited successes of the Circuit Court and these federal commissioners also proved less than effective in convincing Kentucky voters of the benefits to the Commonwealth of allowing black testimony in state courts, let alone extension of the franchise to black men. The August 1868 gubernatorial election proved to be a landslide in favor of Stevenson. A Covington native, he was a known southern sympathizer during the war and in 1868 remained adamantly opposed to any revision of Kentucky’s laws regarding black testimony. Following up on their summer triumph, in November Democrats would carry all nine congressional seats, and this time there would be no attempt in Washington to keep them from being sworn in. Democratic presidential candidate Horatio Seymour carried the Commonwealth by almost as great a margin as Stevenson had enjoyed, though it did him little good nationally. With conservative Democrats firmly in control, Kentucky’s General Assembly soundly defeated a proposal to ratify the Fifteenth Amendment in January 1869, the same month the Kentucky district of the Freedmen’s Bureau formally closed its doors.33

32 J. R. King to H. G. Thomas, March 4, 1868, ULRLCS&CSCO, Entry 1186, BRFAL-KY; G. H. McLaughlin to W. F. Drum, April 5, 1868, Letters Received, Department of Kentucky (hereinafter cited as LRDKY), Entry 2173, United States Army Continental Command, Record Group 393 (hereinafter cited as USACC, RG 393) (National Archives, Washington, D.C.).
33 Webb, Kentucky in the Reconstruction Era, 30-32.
Although Commissioner Howard had kept the Bureau in Kentucky after reading reports of the negative effect his circular letter had produced, in July 1868 Congress approved plans to reorganize the Bureau as a whole, plans that would lead to discontinuing major operations in Kentucky, and indeed throughout the former Confederate states, at the end of 1868. After that time, a limited federal presence would remain to process veterans’ claims and to aid in educational efforts, and some troops would remain to assist federal marshals and those state officials who asked for federal help. Congress held high hopes for newly elected Republican state legislatures in the South, and so it turned over much of the work of Reconstruction to the states. But in Kentucky, where conservative Democrats controlled state government, freed people and those white Kentuckians who sought to aid them would have no such support from the General Assembly and thus had to defend themselves as best they could.34

In the last months of 1868, federal military authorities in the Bluegrass attempted whenever possible to intercede on behalf of freed people against Regulators and Klansmen. On the night of October 12, 1868, Regulators in Lincoln County “visited the cabin of Willis Thurman & John Thurman, both colored…ordering them to come out, saying that they intended to hang them. Both men had served in the USCT, and their attackers referred to them as “God d__n ‘Soldier niggers.’” The black men holed up in their cabin, and the “Ku Klux” attacked, breaking in the door. At that point the former soldiers opened fire, killing one assailant “instantly and mortally wounding two others.” Met with such ferocious defense, the Regulators rode off, and the two freedmen tried to flee the area, heading west to catch the train to Louisville. However, by the time they got to Lebanon, word had been sent by the Lincoln County sheriff to arrest them, which was done. The ever-vigilant J. R. King, still stationed in Lebanon, got word

of their arrest and went in person to check on their status. One of the freedmen had been wounded, but a doctor had treated him. At the time of the attack, the two freedmen had been “working a farm on shares,” and King deemed them to be “industrious and hard workers” who had “acted entirely in self-defense.”

King immediately sent word to his superiors that, short of military intervention, the former soldiers “will be sent back to Stanford…and tried there, and they will be hung without fail, if steps are not taken to prevent it.” In response to his plea, W. F. Drum dispatched a squad of soldiers by the early train from Louisville to Lebanon to take custody of the prisoners and escort them to Stanford, where they would have a hearing before the county judge. As the train made its way from Lebanon east, a crowd of over a hundred men lurked about at one depot, perhaps hoping to be able to seize the prisoners from the local authorities. The presence of federal troops quelled any such attempt, and the two men thus were conveyed peacefully back to Lincoln County. With rumors circulating that the “Crab Orchard boys” might make an appearance, the troops camped out in the jail yard, with guards posted. Indeed, on the night of October 15 a large group of “Ku Klux” gathered in the vicinity of Stanford and sent several spies into town under the premise that they wished to visit a kinsman being detained in the jail. With tension mounting the next night on word from “the Judge and some of the best Union and Rebel citizens of the town” that several hundred of the “Ku Klux” were assembling to storm the jail, the commander of the federal troops, Captain Maize, decided to remove the prisoners to a safe location. After a night journey through the woods to “a side station beyond where any mob was likely to assemble and where they were not known,” the prisoners were placed on a train to Louisville. No arrests were made in conjunction with the threats made by Regulators and their

35 J. R. King to W. F. Drum, October 13, 1868, LRDKY, Entry 2173, USACC, RG 393.
disruption of the trial, which federal officials believed would have resulted in acquittal for the freedmen on the grounds of self-defense.\textsuperscript{36}

In November, Drum received reports from Lexington regarding threats made to Unionists by the Ku Klux Klan. In particular, Morgan Vance, a Unionist from Mercer County who had fled to Lexington for his safety, appealed to federal authorities for protection. The reporting officer noted that “for some days past, suspicious looking characters have been prowling about town.” On the night of November 7, about fifty “mounted & masked” men “were seen on the outskirts of the city,” and at one point several “tough looking men” had visited Vance’s hotel, where they were heard to utter threats toward him. Far from just any Unionist, Vance actually was a federal commissioner in his home county and thus responsible for overseeing efforts to bring perpetrators of racial violence to trial. Although the federal officer in Lexington concluded that Vance likely did have ample cause to fear for his life, as he had for some time past, he did not react with undue alarm, as of late numerous “open threats had been made against the lives of Union men, and our absurd paper, the Lexington Observer & Reporter went so far as to openly advocate war on the part of the Democrats of Kentucky.” Quietly he deployed his available soldiers so as to “ensure the safety of Mr. Vance & other Union men,” and he wrote to his superior, Drum, for specific instructions regarding “cases of this kind.”\textsuperscript{37}

In Louisville, Isaac S. Catlin remained on duty through December, and he continued to receive reports from as far afield as Russellville, Logan County, where on October 22 a twelve-year-old black child had been shot and killed. In November, he got word that a boardinghouse in Franklin, Simpson County, wherein a black female schoolteacher resided, had been riddled with bullets. At the same time, he was informed that a schoolhouse in Shepherdsville, Bullitt County,

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.; W. R. Maize to W. F. Drum, October 18, 1868, LRDKY, Entry 2173, USACC, RG 393.  
\textsuperscript{37} William Palsk to W. F. Drum, November 14, 1868, LRDKY, Entry 2173, USACC, RG 393.
had been burned. In early December he received word that the schoolhouse in Brandenburg, Meade County, had been burned.38

In Lebanon, J. R. King remained active through the end of the year, reporting in mid November that an area schoolhouse had been burned. Catlin, his immediate superior, requested “an appropriation of One Hundred Dollars to assist in rebuilding Freedmen’s Schoolhouse at Sills Farm burned on the 15th last by parties at present unknown.”39 Still, most of King’s duties by this time centered on accompanying Deputy United States Marshals on raids against residents of Marion and Nelson counties who were “guilty of violations of the revenue laws and other crimes.” Marshals had numerous run-ins with locals in 1868 as they ferreted out illegal stills and tried to arrest suspects in other matters.40

With the hated federal presence in the state in decline, conservative Democratic politicians grew still bolder in defying federal law. In January 1869, Governor Stevenson asked the General Assembly to fund an appeal to the United States Supreme Court regarding a case prosecuted under the Civil Rights Act in which two white men had been convicted of murdering four freed people. The defendants had been sentenced to death by the federal judge.41 Kentuckians thus had witnessed the consequences of their adamant refusal to support black testimony, and yet conservatives refused to yield. Other Democrats argued that surely the

38 W. H. Finch and J. B. Finch to I. S. Catlin, November 6, 1868; H. A. Hunter to I. S. Catlin, November 16, 1868; H. A. Hunter to I. S. Catlin, December 9, 1868, both in Letters Received, Louisville Superintendent and Subassistant Commissioner’s Office (hereinafter cited as LRLS&SCO), Entry 1208, BRFAL-KY.
39 I. S. Catlin to Benjamin P. Runkle, with endorsements, November 19, 1868, Unregistered Letters Received, Louisville Superintendent and Subassistant Commissioner’s Office (hereinafter cited as ULRLS&SCO), Entry 1209, BRFAL-KY.
40 J. R. King to W. F. Drum, December 21, 1868, LRDKY, Entry 2173, USACC, RG 393. For examples of previous revenue raids and the rough treatment accorded United States Marshals in the Knobs along the southern fringe of the Bluegrass, see J. R. King to W. F. Drum, February 12, 1868, LRDKY, Entry 2173, USACC, RG 393.
41 Howard, *Black Liberation in Kentucky*, 141.
situation would be better if such testimony were allowed before locally elected judges, rather than the federal court. As one editor phrased it, white men could be “dragged before a federal court, tried, convicted, and hanged or sent to penitentiary, upon negro testimony entirely.” In sum, “Some remedy must be found for this intolerable usurpation.”

Henry Watterson of the Louisville *Courier-Journal*, which, along with the Louisville *Democrat*, had merged in November 1868, followed with the same impeccable logic put forth by his partner Haldeman more than a year earlier, “Equality before the law and political equality, are two different sorts of equality.” By allowing equality before the law, Kentuckians could better defend against the prospects of political equality via the Fifteenth Amendment. In the state election of 1869, Kentucky’s Democratic Party was clearly divided over this issue, with conservatives attempting to use opposition to black testimony as a litmus test for being a true Democrat, and the New Departure Democrats, with Watterson and several other urban editors as their mouthpieces, arguing that resistance to black testimony was undermining the party’s legitimacy. Even though in several races Democrats ran against fellow Democrats, in the end the anti-testimony faction, with its strength in the countryside, dominated the party.

In 1870 the Fifteenth Amendment became law, and Kentucky had to allow black men to vote, renewing hope among freed people for positive change. Black political leaders immediately began organizing, both for the federal mid-term election in 1870 and the all-important state election, including the gubernatorial election, in 1871. Of utmost importance for black voters would be election of candidates who supported black testimony. In particular, cases of sexual assault and paternity cases, which the backlogged federal court generally set aside,

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42 *Louisville Democrat*, February 25, 1869.
43 *Louisville Courier-Journal*, April 13, 1869.
might now be heard in state courts. Numerous black conventions, held in embattled counties such as Lincoln, Nelson, and Garrard, as well as in the state capital and the all-important city of Louisville, denounced the Democratic Party for refusing to allow black testimony. They turned for support to the growing state Republican Party led by men such as John Marshall Harlan who had grown increasingly troubled over the level of racial violence in the Commonwealth. Within this party, black Kentuckians would find political allies, but their hopes of being treated as equals, especially in terms of appointment to office, would go unrealized. Harlan, for example, may have rejected the politics of white supremacy, but he retained his sense of “white paternalism,” that is to say, his belief in white superiority, but with the caveat that “anyone worthy of calling himself a man did not brutalize the weak.”

By 1870, white supremacists in Kentucky routinely were identified as members of the Ku Klux Klan. Residents who in previous years may have spoken of Regulators or “Judge Lynch’s Men” now talked of the “Ku Klux”. Further, individual bands openly advertised in their communities via broadsides that amounted to recruiting posters. A printed broadside from the Commonwealth in that year reads: “K.K.K.” in big bold block letters with skull and crossbones on each. The text reads, “Shadowy forms Awake! Shake from your bones the mouldering dust! Vengeance is ours! Sons of the silent grave our foes are doomed! Think of your thousands slain and bare your glittering blades! When darkness wraps the Southern sphere, MEET!! When the moon’s pale crescent wanes, MEET!!” It was signed, “By order G. G. D. K. Cyclops.” In Lincoln County, Gertrude Pettus again wrote to her brother in Louisville concerning the activities of local white supremacists: “I suppose you have seen an account of the Ku Klux

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47 Printed broadside, ca. 1870, Sanders Family Papers, FHS.
taking Tom Berry out of Mason’s Hotel and hanging him. They also hung a Negro at Crab Orchard on Friday night.”

While many white supremacist groups did operate under the guise of the Klan, some did not bother with such trickery, as they had support at both local and state levels. In Woodford County, members of an all-white volunteer militia organization, newly armed by Governor Stevenson to keep the peace in their county, staged a midnight raid in August 1870 against local black political leaders. James Parker, under threat of having his house stormed and family killed, opened the door to the militia and was immediately shot and killed. When the band visited William Turpin’s house, he tried to escape out a window but also was shot and killed. A county inquest determined that these men had been killed by parties unknown. The militia sent written warnings to other black men interested in politics, telling them to stop organizing or face the same fate as Parker and Turpin. Stevenson, in typical rhetoric, denounced the murders, called for a local investigation, and offered a reward, but no arrests were forthcoming.

In the last months of 1870, federal prosecutors in Kentucky took a bold new step by enforcing the clause in the Civil Rights Act of 1866 by which judges who refused to admit black witnesses could be indicted on federal charges. By January 1871, with several judges facing charges, their cases intentionally continued until such time as the General Assembly passed a bill admitting black testimony, Watterson and others again argued that passage of such a bill would be in the best interests of white Kentuckians. The editor of the Danville Kentucky Advocate, James R. Marrs, took the argument a step further, concluding that denial of black testimony had allowed Regulators and members of the Ku Klux Klan to continue their reign of terror.

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48 Gertrude Pettus to Joseph Pettus, April 3, 1870, Pettus-Speiden Family Papers, FHS.
49 Wright, Racial Violence in Kentucky, 48-49.
50 Howard, “The Kentucky Press and the Negro Testimony Controversy,” 43-44.
Watterson also railed against the “desperado who calls himself a Ku Klux,” further noting that “pretending to be a Democrat and relying on the want of Democratic legislation, he is the most fatal of Radical emissaries, who is mightily undermining the foundations of State authority, and piling up fuel for the partisans of Federal usurpations.” Nonetheless, in 1871, the General Assembly for the fifth time refused to pass a law admitting black testimony against white defendants in state courts. Still, some judges began admitting black testimony anyway as a means by which to avoid federal indictment.

With the realization of black voting rights in Kentucky, Regulators and bands of “KuKluxers” if anything escalated their terror campaign, striking frequently in the vicinity of the state’s capital. In the long-besieged free black community of Stamping Ground, just across the line in neighboring Scott County, a group of white men killed a shoemaker named Cupin, then moved on to nearby Watkinsville, where a group of freedmen fought back but sustained several casualties. After this incident in January 1871, many freed people from these communities fled to Frankfort looking for safety. Additionally, a black mail clerk working on the Lexington-Louisville mail run, had been assaulted while the train was stopped at North Benson Station, nine miles west of Frankfort. Four men had jumped on the train, with one of them entering the mail car and attempting to force the clerk off the train, vowing to kill him. His resistance, coupled with the fact that at that moment the train lurched into motion, probably saved him. Even after the posting of ten federal guards on the train failed to end threats against the clerk, federal authorities suspended delivering the mail on this vital route, thus forcing the state government to

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52 Howard, Black Liberation in Kentucky, 143-144.
take at least some responsibility for protecting mail trains. After much bickering and name-calling at both the state and federal levels, mail delivery was restored.\textsuperscript{53}

Even the state capital was not immune to Regulator activity, as demonstrated when, on February 25, 1871, more than seventy-five armed men stormed the Franklin County jail and liberated a white prisoner who was charged with the murder of a freedman. Thomas Scroggins was being held over for trial in federal court, as the case against him involved black witnesses, when the jailbreak occurred. His liberators reportedly justified their actions “on the grounds that no white man should be forced to defend himself in court against the word of a black man. For his part, the jailor, who had been captured along with a night watchman and four militia guards, testified that he had not recognized any of the masked men who had forced him to release the prisoner.”\textsuperscript{54} As John Marshall Harlan observed that year, locals feared to take action against Regulators, even in Frankfort, as “their lives and property would probably both be destroyed if they publicly warred against the KuKlux.”\textsuperscript{55}

In February 1871, Governor Stevenson resigned his office to become a United States senator from Kentucky. Lieutenant Governor Preston H. Leslie now became governor, and he would run in August for election to a full term. A former Whig who had become a Southern Rights Democrat, he had vehemently opposed Congressional Reconstruction. Republicans ran John Marshall Harlan, also a former Whig, but a Unionist Democrat during and immediately after the war. With the state-level ascendancy of conservative Democrats in 1867, he had joined the Republican Party. Harlan made a strong impression on the campaign trail, calling for

\textsuperscript{53} Tapp and Klotter, \textit{Kentucky: Decades of Discord}, 382-384.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.; Wright, \textit{Racial Violence in Kentucky}, 27.
Republicans and moderate Democrats to unite around common issues such as education and railroad initiatives, including the proposed Cincinnati and Southern Railroad, as well as accepting the Reconstruction Amendments. Leslie enjoyed the support of the well-established conservative Democratic base, as well as being a known supporter of the increasingly powerful Louisville and Nashville Railroad, and he won the election over Harlan by a margin of more than 35,000 votes. Still, the strength of Republicans, coupled with the influence of New Departure Democrats and even a few black political leaders who had joined the Democratic Party hoping to work for change within the majority faction, pulled Leslie toward the center.56

In Governor Leslie’s first year in office, and with his strong support, the General Assembly finally would pass a bill setting aside all restrictions against black testimony and participation in the state’s judicial system. With the signing of this bill into law, black Kentuckians ostensibly had won a hard-fought and long-hoped-for victory. They won a second contest when the General Assembly passed a bill meant to curb via stiff fines the activities of night riders, Regulators, Klansmen, and any other armed, disguised bands in the state. Certainly some victims of racial violence would now find justice in state courts, but many others would not. More frequently, white Kentuckians injured in one manner or another by the activities of Regulators and Klansmen would now call on black witnesses to aid in their legal battles against these bands. African American plaintiffs, however, now would be at the mercy of locally elected judges and sheriffs, and white juries, with little hope of appeal to the federal court system.57

An incident in the autumn of 1872 clearly illustrates the extent to which black Kentuckians continued to suffer from less than adequate legal protection. On October 20, a party

56 Channing, Kentucky: A Bicentennial History, 146-151; Harrison and Klotter, New History of Kentucky, 244-246; Howard, Black Liberation in Kentucky, 157-159.
57 Coulter, Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky, 364-365; Channing, Kentucky: A Bicentennial History, 151.
of some twenty-five mounted, armed men rode into Owingsville, in Bath County, and broke into
the jail. They seized Sam Bascom, arrested on suspicion of arson, and disappeared into the
night. His body was discovered the next day, hanging from a tree outside of town, a note pinned
to him that read: “Look Out. Penalty of house burners and horse thieves. He who moves the
body before 10:00 will meet the same fate.” In point of fact, no fire had actually been set in
Owingsville, though reportedly some flammable material had been found under a local store
building, which somehow implicated Bascom. Arson has traditionally served as a weapon of
resistance, but as it resulted in destruction of property and therefore one’s livelihood, it, like
horse thieving, was an offence against which a community would legitimately be outraged. If
Bascom’s guilt was ambiguous, the warning was clear, particularly in its message to black
residents of Bath County. In this corner of the Bluegrass, Judge Lynch, and the white
supremacists he masked, still presided from the back of a horse.\textsuperscript{58}

On October 23, Henry Watterson wrote an editorial on the lynching, noting among other
things that the “guilt of the Negro was by no means conclusive, nor was his offense of capital
nature, if even he were guilty.” He followed up this phrase with vintage hyperbole, “it was a
piece of mob law such as has been almost unprecedented in the criminal history of the state, and
the participants should be hunted down with all the appliances of the law, and punished without
mercy.” Far from unprecedented, this type of lynching of not only black but also white
defendants had been almost commonplace since the end of the Civil War. Watterson then got to
the real motivation for his editorial, “The crime committed in this little interior town reflects

\textsuperscript{58} Wright, \textit{Racial Violence in Kentucky}, 47-48; Lucas, \textit{History of Blacks in Kentucky, Vol. I}, 293-
294; Tapp and Klotter, \textit{Kentucky: Decades of Discord}, 384-385; Christopher Waldrep, \textit{The Many
Faces of Judge Lynch: Extralegal Violence and Punishment in America} (New York: Palgrave
McMillan, 2002), 73. See Albert C. Smith, “‘Southern Violence’ Reconsidered: Arson as Protest
in Black-Belt Georgia, 1865-1910,” \textit{Journal of Southern History} 51, 4 (November 1985): 527-
564.
upon the whole commonwealth, and if the local authorities be not sufficiently energetic and willing, then let the people of the state demand of them the energy and the disposition to discover and prosecute the murderers to the extremist limit of the law.” Even in his ongoing efforts to clean up and make palatable Kentucky’s image, further tarnished by inclusion of the Commonwealth in a congressional investigation of Klan activity, he continued to prioritize local authority over that of the state or nation. Though he was a New Departure Democrat, he utilized rhetoric reminiscent of both Thomas Bramlette and John W. Stevenson when he called “upon the people of Bath County to rid themselves of the foul stigma upon their name and fame stained in the bloody outrage.”

Assistant Commissioner Burbank, in trying to persuade Commissioner Howard of the necessity of maintaining a strong Bureau presence in Kentucky, had painted a rather rosy picture of the condition of freed people in the Commonwealth as 1867 had drawn to a close, one somewhat at odds with the Bureau’s own statistics. Annual reports chronicle a consistent level of violence during the Bureau’s first three years of operation in Kentucky, with 319 reported outrages for 1866, 324 for 1867, and 327 for 1868. Similarly, reports of murders numbered twenty the first year, twenty the second, and twenty-six in the third. Yet there is no doubt that the Bureau presence, particularly when properly supported by squads of federal troops, mitigated racial violence, judging by the rapid escalation of verifiable lynching in the years immediately following the Bureau’s scale-back. Indeed, George C. Wright has argued that these years represented the zenith of racial violence in Kentucky, centered on the year of 1870.

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59 Louisville *Courier-Journal*, October 23, 1872.
In his careful tabulation of lynching in the Commonwealth, Wright by his own admission left out numerous reports filed by Bureau agents because they could not be independently verified from other sources, such as newspapers. Still, his numbers are chilling and clearly reveal both the escalation of violence in the years during which the Bureau was being phased out in Kentucky and the scope of Regulator activity in the southern Bluegrass. Whereas he could only verify six lynchings of freedmen for all of Kentucky in 1866 and five for 1867, for 1868 he listed sixteen, with thirteen the following year and twenty-eight for 1870. He listed only seven in 1871, but still he had absolutely verified a total of seventy-four lynchings of freedmen from 1865 to 1871. Of these, fifty-three occurred in the counties included in this study, with a stunning thirty-six taking place in the southern Bluegrass counties of Boyle (2), Garrard (2), Jessamine (5), Lincoln (5), Madison (8), Marion (1), Mercer (7), and Washington (6). Further, of the twenty-eight lynchings of persons either identified as white or not given a racial classification, eighteen occurred in the Bluegrass, with thirteen in the counties of Boyle (2), Madison (1), Marion (4), and Mercer (6). By all appearances, Mercer, home to historic Harrodsburg, was the deadliest county in the state during these years.62

In fear and frustration over post-emancipation violence, thousands of freed people appear to have fled Kentucky in the years between 1865 and 1871. In the Bluegrass counties included in this study, the total black population in 1860 was approximately 130,000. By 1870, this population was down to about 122,000. Overall, Kentucky counted approximately 236,000 persons of color in 1860, but only about 222,000 in 1870. Still, those numbers indicate the large number of freed people remaining in the Commonwealth, most of whom had limited ability to

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62 Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky*, 307-311. It is worth reiterating that these lynchings represent only the ones reported by multiple sources. The real totals likely were far higher, especially in the first months and years after emancipation, as Wright makes clear.
enjoy their freedom due to the politics of white supremacy. By the early 1870s, though in theory they had been granted equal rights and equal protection under the law, black men and women in the Commonwealth had, for the most part, failed to achieve the level of freedom they desired.

Freed people in Kentucky frequently struggled and failed to build new homes and lives for themselves in the aftermath of the Civil War, in large measure due to Regulator attacks on their households and persons.63 As an avid fan from Garrard County had noted in 1868, her community had “a band of invisible, nocturnal Regulators who keep the negroes straight.” Such bands of Regulators “manage to cause a good deal of terror in our region.”64 The racial legacy of this reign of terror, along with the dreams of black autonomy and equality that went unrealized because of it, continues to haunt the Bluegrass and, indeed, the whole of Kentucky.

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Epilogue:

“Goebel Has Been Shot!”:
The Politics of Violence in Gilded Age Kentucky

Though technically beaten in the 1899 election, Democratic gubernatorial wannabe William Goebel of Kenton County appeared far from defeated in 1900. Goebel had an ace up the sleeve, in that the Democrat-controlled General Assembly had initiated a review of the election. By stacking the investigating committee with Democrats, and then using their dominance in the Assembly to confirm the committee’s findings, Goebel’s allies could still win him the governorship. After all, a similar sequence of events recently had been utilized by Democrats in Tennessee, and so it seemed that it would be New South politics as usual that winter day in Frankfort. Accompanied by two friends who likely were armed, Goebel followed his typical routine and walked from his hotel room to the capitol. He was just reaching the building’s steps when a shot rang out from the general direction of the adjacent state office building. A single slug fired from a Marlin rifle struck and mortally wounded Goebel, thus setting in motion one of the more bizarre sequences of events in United States political history.¹

Republican William S. Taylor, the duly elected, recently inaugurated governor, had called out the state militia and banished Democratic legislators from the capitol, forcing them to meet in secret at Frankfort’s legendary Capitol Hotel. Among the hundreds of armed Taylor supporters in the capital, threats against Goebel abounded, and so by all appearances a lone

Republican had decided to back up his words with deeds. On January 31, even as the dying Goebel lay in another room, Democrats again convened in the Capitol Hotel and voted to overturn the election results, thus ousting Taylor. That night, Chief Justice James H. Hazelrigg of the Court of Appeals swore in the possibly unconscious candidate as governor. Oddly enough, just to prove this was a legitimate action, Democrats staged a more formal inauguration on February 2, at which time they also inaugurated thirty year old Speaker of the House J. C. W. Beckham of Nelson County as lieutenant governor. The next evening Goebel died, leaving Beckham the temporary governor. He took office in the midst of an armed camp, as both Republicans and Democrats had literally rallied troops in Frankfort, just in case a civil war should break out. With Goebel’s death, however, tensions eased, at least between the military commanders directly responsible for controlling the opposing militias. In the end, Democrats simply had too much political power at the state level, and national Republicans, including President McKinley, refused to intervene on Taylor’s behalf. Thus Democrats could be magnanimous in their efforts to make peace with at least some prominent Republicans, and some Republicans gladly accepted their offer, no doubt fearing the outbreak at a statewide level of the type of political violence already experienced in so many individual counties.2

In the aftermath of the Civil War, Kentuckians frequently resorted to politics by violent means, mostly in the form of voter intimidation and, on occasion, assassination, in their efforts to manipulate the system in their favor. Election-day fights were a commonplace occurrence. Though often attributed to the effects of corn liquor, in reality these sometimes lethal brawls were part and parcel of the political culture of the Commonwealth. In the first decade after the

war, not only were elections marred by bloodshed, but assassins could rise to local prominence. In Lincoln County, former Confederate guerrilla, long-time leader of the Crab Orchard Gang, and known assassin Walter G. Saunders had been elected county sheriff by 1870, illustrating the extent of Regulator rule at the local level. Ironically, a few years later Saunders, no longer sheriff and, as was the case of many of his Regulator peers by that time, officially an outlaw, would die from a gunshot wound inflicted by a deputy marshal in the midst of a famous shootout on the streets of Richmond, the county seat of Madison. Yet his death in true “Wild West” fashion seems only to have solidified his image of a “colorful character” in the minds of many Kentuckians. ³ By justifying attacks first on abolitionists, then on so-called Radicals and their free black allies, white Kentuckians placed themselves in a position of having to accept political violence for seemingly lesser evils than Negro domination.

In such a violent climate, judges and courthouses frequently came under fire. In March 1879, for example, Thomas Buford of Henry County demonstrated the ease with which an annoying judge could be kicked out of office when he shot and killed John Milton Elliot on the streets of Frankfort, ostensibly because he did not agree with one of the judge’s rulings.⁴ In April 1884 in Mount Sterling, attorney John Jay Cornelison, apparently feeling economically injured and betrayed by a judge he deemed his friend, repeatedly hit Richard Reid over the head with a hickory cane, and then chased the dazed and bloodied judge down a crowded street, lashing him with a cowhide whip. A month later, the humiliated, indeed symbolically emasculated, Reid took his own life, while Cornelison justified his actions as a matter of honor.⁵

³ Danville Kentucky Advocate, August 25, 1996.
⁴ Harrison and Klotter, New History of Kentucky, 252.
Developing counties east of the Bluegrass Region suffered much political violence as local factions struggled for dominance. Most of these counties had seen substantive upheaval during the Civil War, and, unlike Bluegrass counties, most had no dominant antebellum elite in place to reassert control after the war. Eastern Kentuckians also had to adapt to changing economic relationships wrought as outsiders and local entrepreneurs tried to capitalize on the region’s abundant natural resources, including timber and coal. Thus numerous community conflicts erupted as competing factions vied for local control and economic advantage, including efforts to encourage railroads to come their way. In 1880 rival factions in Perry County waged a two-day battle in the streets of Hazard. In 1882, the state militia, responding to requests for help, tried to intervene in Boyd County against Judge Lynch’s Men, only to come under attack. The resulting shootout, dubbed the “battle of Ashland,” left four dead and several wounded. In neighboring Carter County, Regulators slugged it out with local opponents in the late 1870s, and when the state moved to intervene, they appear to have taken the side of the Regulators.6

Participants in the Carter County contest had close ties to neighboring Rowan County, where in 1884 open warfare erupted as a result of an election dispute. What began as individual acts of retribution escalated when local Democrats, dominated by the Tolliver family, seized control of the judicial system in the county seat of Morehead. The opposing Martin faction, Republicans represented by attorney Daniel Boone Logan, petitioned the Democratic governor for relief, only to be told that this was a local matter that needed to be settled by Rowan County residents. In response, Logan went to Cincinnati and apparently bought up every firearm and all the ammunition he could lay hands on. By 1887 he commanded a well-armed citizens’ committee numbering over a hundred men, and this group successfully drove the Tollivers from

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power. Within three years twenty men had been killed and nearly that many wounded. In the end, Governor Knott pardoned Logan and his men for their role in the bloodshed and even intervened to keep the Tollivers from retaliating. He had to do so, as this so-called “county war” had become a major embarrassment for his administration by this point, as had the renewal of hostilities in Perry County and elsewhere in the late 1880s.7

In Harlan, the county courthouse again was the center of conflict as a “feud” reached its climax in June 1889. One faction holed up in the building while the other faction laid siege to it. Estimates run as high as fifty deaths as a result of this decades-long struggle for local power. Likewise, though the alleged feud between the Hatfields and McCoys made for great storytelling, the 1890s conflict in Clay County was far more deadly, culminating in a pitched battle at the Manchester courthouse between rival political factions, with Democrats being led by the elite White family and their Howard family allies, while Republicans were led by the elite Garrard family and their Baker family allies. In particular, these factions fought over control of the key offices of county judge and sheriff, and over the course of this community conflict they settled their differences both in court and through violent means.8

These are but the more prominent and widely publicized examples of Gilded Age community conflicts and courthouse battles in Kentucky. Of all the stories of feuding in the Commonwealth, the story of Breathitt County may be most illustrative. This county had seen its share of fighting during the Civil War, mostly involving local guerrilla bands and Home Guard units. Still, what came afterward made these clashes pale by comparison. In 1874, one faction

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took over the courthouse and fortified it, with the result that the state militia had to be called in to restore order. Four years later, a county judge was assassinated, and the circuit court judge disappeared. Again, a faction seized the courthouse, and once more the state militia had to occupy the county seat of Jackson to restore order. A contributor to the *Kentucky Yeoman* listed the toll:

> Total killed during the war, 19; total killed since the war, 26; total killed during and since the war, 45. Wounded since the war, 30. Notwithstanding all this crime and bloodshed, not one has been hung or sent to the penitentiary from this county for any of these crimes. But three persons have been sent to the penitentiary since the war—one for arson and two for grand larceny.

> The magistrates, sheriffs, grand jurors, constables, etc., all drink, curse, fight, dance, play cards, and violate the laws in various other ways, together, but never steal, except what little they filch from the Commonwealth. They know no law except that concerning concealed weapons and tippling-houses, and they are perfection itself in these. The officers never think of enforcing the laws against drunkenness, profane swearing, or bribery in executions.

> Sensationalized accounts of the state of affairs in “Bloody Breathitt” aside, this county would evidence serious internal conflicts for decades to come. In the 1890s a fight broke out between the faction led by the Democratic county judge, James Hargis, and the faction led by a Republican attorney, James B. Marcum. Hargis had the county sheriff, Ed Callahan, on his side, but Marcum had the Jackson town marshal, Tom Cockrell, on his side. Numerous murders occurred in which the leaders were complicit, culminating in the assassination of Marcum in 1903, followed by the assassination of Callahan several years later. In the meantime, Hargis had been killed by his own son, who was reportedly intoxicated at the time. All of these events proved irresistible to the press, and stories from Breathitt eclipsed the Hatfields and McCoys in terms of national audience. Not surprisingly, overt economic exploitation followed in the wake

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10 Frankfort *Kentucky Yeoman*, January 7, 1879.
of this wave of violence and mocking celebrity. Breathitt’s hillsides were clear-cut, her topsoil washed away, and her residents left in poverty. Violence continued to haunt the county, particularly during the Great Depression when sheriff’s Deputy Jerry Combs was shot and killed, Sheriff Fred Deaton’s son, a deputy sheriff, shot and wounded, and, finally, Sheriff Deaton himself assassinated, a story that was covered in *Time Magazine*.

A major reason for local violence lay in the autonomous nature of Kentucky counties, as illustrated in the Rowan County war. As Robert M. Ireland has noted, “conflict over county offices often precipitated feuds; failure of county officers to enforce laws often perpetuated them.” Though accurate, this assessment fails to address the underlying social and economic tensions that erupted into such conflicts. In contrast to the former Confederate states, Kentucky, according to Thomas D. Clark, “retained her ante-bellum constitution until social and economic maladjustment forced the calling of a convention in 1890.” This “maladjustment” frequently involved racial and political violence, often as a means of seizing and maintaining local control, alongside of widespread economic hardship and increasing frustration with corporations, particularly railroads charging seemingly astronomical rates for short hauls. Clark further observed that, by 1890,

> Counties had assumed burdens of bonded indebtedness to subsidize the building of railroads, and as agricultural prices fell in the eighties, special taxation and increasing freight rates became virtually confiscatory. It is little wonder that farmer-constitutionalists debated furiously the corporate sections of the constitution.

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Indeed, it is little wonder that these same men frequently took matters into their own hands to oppose or drive out local officials whom they held responsible for social and economic change that brought with it such high taxes and rates.

Debate over Kentucky’s new constitution coincided with the larger Populist impulse in America. As was the case in other southern states, Kentucky Democrats had to address this surge of Populism, both as a third party movement and, by the mid-1990s, a legitimate wing of their own party. Ambitious politicians such as William Goebel embraced enough of this Populist agenda to become champions to those who felt betrayed and abused by banks, railroads, and other big corporations. But Goebel had another powerbase in the Commonwealth, one that had been building and growing since mid-century, in that he served the interests of urban Kentuckians, as well as being a representative German American. Further, he was a Democrat unafraid to court the black vote, thus violating the sensitivities of conservative Democrats by rejecting the tactic of rallying rural white support via the rhetoric of white supremacy.14

Goebel’s tactics put him at odds with numerous members of his own party, particularly former Confederates and other Kentuckians who identified with the Lost Cause. Further damaging his reputation with this Democratic faction, in 1895 Goebel shot and killed a Confederate veteran in a gunfight on the steps of the First National Bank in Covington. Political differences with fellow Democrat John Sanford had escalated beyond the possibility of compromise, and when the two met on the steps, both men reached for the revolvers they invariably kept in their pockets. Reportedly, both men fired at least one shot, but in the end Sanford lay mortally wounded and Goebel walked away unscathed, both physically and, to a degree, politically. After all, this was Kentucky, and, in the judgment of many of his peers, it

14 Klotter, William Goebel, 74-75.
had been a fair fight. Goebel apparently even had a bullet hole in his clothing to prove that he had been fired upon by Sanford.¹⁵

For their part, Bluegrass Republicans were not immune to such bloody infighting. In 1889, prominent Republican Judge William Cassius Goodloe, former Freedmen’s Bureau agent and Lexington newspaper editor, had been insulted by another Republican, Union Army veteran Colonel Armistead M. Swope, born and raised in Lincoln County but living in Lexington. Goodloe asked his uncle, Cassius M. Clay, for advice. Reportedly Clay retrieved a knife from his impressive collection and gave it to his nephew, with the admonition that if he failed to defend his honor he was unworthy to be kin to the Clays. When Goodloe encountered Swope at the Lexington post office, he attacked, repeatedly stabbing his opponent. Swope in turn drew his revolver and fired twice, with the result that both men were mortally wounded. Cassius Clay, in mourning the death of his beloved nephew, nonetheless implied that Goodloe had handled the knife, and the matter of honor, as well as Clay himself could have done.¹⁶

Still, Republicans proved more able to overcome their internal divisions, and by the mid-1890s they had emerged as a powerful opposition party in Kentucky. Capitalizing on the deep rift in the Democratic Party represented by the Sanford/Goebel incident, Republicans were able to win the governorship in 1895. In turn, the new governor, William O. Bradley, would have to address widespread community violence in virtually every region of the state. In particular, as part of the political challenge to privately-owned toll roads, bands of “Toll Gate Raiders” throughout the Bluegrass burned toll houses, tore apart gates, and terrorized toll collectors. Largely dismissed as the actions “of an uneducated and violently inclined class of people,” these

¹⁵ Klotter, William Goebel, 32-43.
bands nonetheless demonstrated similar organization to “the earlier guerrillas and Ku Kluxers.” Though Governor Bradley denounced the practice, in many cases local officials, for the most part Democrats, seem to have supported the night riders. Further, some Bluegrass counties were able to buy private toll roads at a bargain rate in the wake of such attacks.17

Ironically, election of a Republican governor allowed the ambitious Goebel to mend some political fences, but also to attack certain of the Democratic old guard even more vigorously. While Kentucky’s old guard continued looking backward to the heyday of conservatism, Goebel embraced limited reform. He supported toll road reform, thus appealing to the Toll Gate Raiders and their allies. Additionally, he backed a bill to end the state monopoly on school textbooks, thereby attempting to lower the high cost of education. Among the more controversial of reforms, the “Goebel Election Law” established a three-person Board of Elections Commissioners in Kentucky, for the purpose of monitoring elections at the precinct level, as well as ruling on the validity of state election results. The real controversy lay in the fact that the first three commissioners were, to a man, Goebel supporters. With this new board in place, Goebel ran for governor in 1899 on a modified Populist platform, including a promise to fight for the common folk against the hated railroads. Though he won the Democratic nomination, the ugly convention fight in Louisville that gave it to him resulted in another Democratic split, once again opening the door for the Republicans. Their candidate, Taylor, won the election over Goebel and the aforementioned Brown. The Elections Commissioners, by a two to one vote, certified the results, making Taylor governor.18

Thus the stage was set for the events that transpired the following January. Who shot Goebel? The mystery remains unsolved, but the real trigger man may well not have been a

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17 Ibid., 404-409.
18 Klotter, William Goebel, 43-92.
Republican, at least not a sane one, as the assassination all but ended William Taylor’s
governorship. He tried to stay in office, declaring the actions of the General Assembly invalid,
and for a time Kentucky had two governors, with wary banks refusing to cash checks from either
administration. The case over who should be governor of the Commonwealth went all the way
to the United States Supreme Court, but with only John Marshall Harlan dissenting, this august
body ruled in May 1900 that the matter was up to Kentucky to resolve. This decision upheld the
legitimacy of the actions of the General Assembly, and so Beckham would remain in office until
such time as a new election could be held, the same procedure that had been followed after John
Helm’s death in office. Further, Taylor would be indicted as an accessory to murder, after which
he fled the state. Because the Supreme Court ruling did not nullify his deathbed inauguration,
Goebel remains the only United States governor to have died in office by an assassin’s bullet.19

The label of assassin came to rest for a time on the shoulders of Clay County Republican
Big Jim Howard, a known “feudist” and certainly familiar enough with a Marlin rifle to have hit
his mark. Still, no less an authority on Kentucky history than Thomas D. Clark strongly implied
that, whoever pulled the trigger, the motivation for the assassination came from the Louisville
and Nashville Railroad. This massive corporation, easily the most powerful in Kentucky, had
backed the losing horse in the primary. Goebel had won the nomination running as a friend of
the people and promising to push through long-needed railroad reform. The L & N then had
thrown its support behind an old ally, John Y. Brown, a former governor and conservative
Democrat running as a third-party candidate, with the blessing of a fair portion of Kentucky
Democrats who had come to despise the man known as “King William of Kenton.”20

After the state election, Taylor supporters, fearing some sort of power play on the part of Democrats, had flooded Frankfort with armed men, many of them from Republican strongholds in eastern Kentucky. The L & N supposedly aided in the rapid deployment of this oversized citizens’ committee, no doubt willing to cover the cost of fares to ensure that Goebel, their arch nemesis, did not become governor. If they had not been able to get their ally, Brown, back in the governor’s mansion, at least they would have another Republican governor to counterbalance the Democrat-dominated General Assembly. This had worked to their advantage in 1898, when Governor Bradley had vetoed the McChord railroad bill. In such a divisive political environment, surely they would be free to conduct business as usual. The only possible fly in the ointment was Goebel himself, but by 1900 numerous local political factions had clearly demonstrated the ease with which any given fly in the Commonwealth could be swatted.21

Community violence, centered on issues of local control and economic concerns, would continue into the new century, both in the mountain counties and elsewhere. In southwestern Kentucky and adjoining Tennessee counties, the practice of night riding re-emerged. A group of white tobacco planters in the Black Patch, descended from the local slaveholding elite, fell back on the Regulator tradition in an attempt to resist the larger economic forces that were devastating the local economy and thereby contributing to a rapid decline in their economic and political status. In this context, violence was most often directed against tobacco planters who refused to join the Planters’ Protective Association in battling the villainous tobacco trust. Racial violence served as a component of this campaign in that black laborers were sorely needed to help these elite planters maximize their crops, and so these laborers needed to be held in place by any available means. Further, independent tobacco growers, whether black or white, could expect to

21 Ibid.
be visited by barn burners should they fail to support the association. While the elite members of the Planters’ Protective Association were almost to a man the sons of slaveholders, most of their black laborers were not only the children of slaves or themselves former slaves, but also witnesses to post-emancipation Regulator violence. Economic hardship had already forced many black tobacco workers to leave the region, and with the renewal of night riding, many more would flee, some of them actually heading south to Mississippi.²²

In the end, the Association failed to achieve community legitimacy in that it did not meet the expectations of the small-scale growers whose support it required if it was to present a unified challenge to the trust. The very tactics utilized by the night riders and their elite sponsors assured the failure of the Association. Though they had identified themselves as the rightful heirs of Regulators, they failed to understand that Regulators and their allies had also proven unsuccessful in attaining legitimacy in the eyes of their communities, primarily because they imposed their own agenda on those communities rather than actually defending community norms. Regulators in nearby Logan County had launched devastating attacks on the Shaker community at South Union, beginning in 1868. While the Shakers’ egalitarianism, particularly regarding race, may have offended area white residents, by attacking them Regulators attacked an invaluable local source of high-quality beef, cloth, including wool and silk, manufactured items, preserves, and especially seeds. Thus local and regional farmers paid the price for Regulator violence in that many of them both wanted and needed what the Shakers supplied.²³

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Like so many communities before them, Black Patch residents, when faced with community violence, appealed to the legal system and outside authorities for help. Unlike many of their nineteenth century counterparts, in this case state troops moved in and for the most part protected the interests of local farmers and workers, not those of the planter elite, and so the Black Patch Wars came to an end. Still, as in so many areas of Kentucky, the combination of economic hardship and racial violence had led to a mass movement out of the region on the part of African Americans. Indeed, in these and many other of the former slaveholding counties of the Commonwealth, so many African Americans fled in the decades following the Civil War that, in retrospect, today’s residents have a difficult time believing that thousands of slaves and freed people had lived there in the nineteenth century.

Distinguishing itself from the increasingly “solid South,” by the mid-1890s Kentucky had entered a period of dynamic two-party competition at the state level that, as in the cases of Clay and Breathitt, sometimes played out violently at the local level. Still, both parties proved equally incapable of curbing ongoing racial violence. In this era of intense social and political frustration, as well as economic transformation and woe, racially motivated lynching often took the form of public spectacle and had at least tacit support from local authorities. On December 9, 1899, Richard Coleman, a young black man from Mason County being held in Covington pending trial for the rape and murder of a white woman, was placed on a train bound for Maysville. Before marshals could deliver their prisoner to the local jail, a large group of citizens, led by the victim’s husband, demanded that Coleman be handed over to them. His guards complied, and the subsequently convened sham court of Judge Lynch sentenced the

Such a Rage’ in a Southern Community during Reconstruction,” *Journal of Southern History* 70, 3 (August 2004): 577-602.
accused to be roasted alive. Hundreds of Mason County residents, young and old, male and female, participated in the lynching by adding fuel to the pyre as the victim was tortured and burned to death over a four-hour period. Though the lynching took place in broad daylight, none of the participants bothered with disguise, and none faced charges afterward. Once the fire had died down, what remained of Coleman was dragged through the historic port city in a macabre parade that included taking of trophies from the charred corpse.  

Far from being discrete or random acts of violence, lynching served as a component of Kentucky’s community-level political and legal culture, which had been sculpted for decades by the politics of violence. Caught up in the rhetoric of white supremacy, common white Kentuckians joined with elites in abusing and murdering black victims as a means of “constructing an illusion that they were indeed managing their lives in important ways.” In turn, these common folk became scapegoats for the elites who sought to mask their own roles in such abhorrent acts. The end result was that common whites also were victimized by white supremacists, who “did not so much use poor white men to achieve their ends as they used the image of the poor white man, the white savage lurking just beneath respectable restraint.”

This stereotype of devolving, violent, southern rural white folk, particularly Kentuckians, became stock in trade for the northern popular press at a time when the nation was wracked by violence of both an individual and a collective nature, culminating in the assassination of President McKinley. Like white supremacist elites who had blamed the rabble mob first for Klan violence and then for lynching, Bluegrass politicians sought to blame eastern Kentuckians

not only for Goebel’s assassination but much of the state’s violence and unrest throughout the Gilded Age. The exploits of these alleged ignorant, rural feudists became such a national topic of interest that the concept of Appalachia was in effect constructed to explain this perceived violent aberration within American society. In the final analysis, however, outsiders seemed incapable of making the largely artificial regional distinctions Kentuckians made amongst themselves, and the stereotype of the violent, backward Kentuckian became engrained in the national consciousness.26

In the Bluegrass and beyond, post-emancipation violence, highly political in nature and intended to redeem the Commonwealth from federal interference, had instead escalated beyond control, ultimately giving some credence to the idea of Kentucky as a place “where the sun set crimson and the moon rose red.” As James G. Speed summed up the stereotype in 1900, “The Kentuckian” has “a singular disregard for the sacredness of human life.” By the time it entered the twentieth century, the once proud and nationally prominent Commonwealth of Kentucky had become easy fodder for derision and jokes on the part of the emerging national mass media, and, subsequently, further exploitation on the part of capitalists, both from within and without.27 As would be the case throughout the New South to which it now belonged, poor families, white and black, though generally separated by racism, together would bear the brunt of this exploitation for generations to come.

Appendix
Kentucky Counties Included in this Study
(Based on 1867 Freedmen’s Bureau Sub-districts)

Key
- Lexington Sub-district counties included in study
- Louisville Sub-district counties included in study
- Central Sub-district counties included in study
  Counties established by 1867 but not included in study
Government Document Collections

National Archives Record Group 92: Office of the Quartermaster General, Claims Branch, 1861-1889

National Archives Record Group 94: Records of the Adjutant General’s Office, 1780s to 1917

National Archives Record Group 105: Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861-1879

National Archives Record Group 107: Records of the Office of the Secretary of War, 1791-1947

National Archives Record Group 110: Records of the Provost Marshal General’s Bureau (Civil War)

National Archives Record Group 393: Records of United States Army Continental Commands, 1821-1929

Population of the United States in 1860, compiled from the 8th Census

Manufactures of the United States in 1860, compiled from the 8th Census

Agriculture of the United States in 1860, compiled from the 8th Census

Population of the United States in 1870, compiled from the 9th Census

Manuscript Collections

Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky

Bullitt Family Papers
Hart, Joel Tanner, Papers
Howard, Betty, Diary
Palmer, John McAuley, Letters
Pettus-Speiden Family Papers
Sanders Family Papers
Stone Collection
Union Soldiers’ Letters
Winn-Cook Family Papers
Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, Kentucky
    Scrogin/Haviland Collection
Kentucky Military History Museum, Frankfort, Kentucky
    Quartermaster and Adjutant General’s Papers
Kentucky State Division of Libraries and Archives, Frankfort, Kentucky
    Governor Thomas E. Bramlette’s Official Correspondence
Margaret King Library, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky
    William Cassius Goodloe Civil War Scrapbooks
Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina
    William Potts and William Potts II Papers
Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
    W. H. Stewart Reminiscences
Newspapers and Magazines
    Century Magazine
    Cincinnati Enquirer
    Cincinnati Gazette
    Danville Kentucky Advocate
    Danville Advocate-Messenger
    Frankfort Commonwealth
    Frankfort Kentucky Yeoman
    Lexington Kentucky Statesman
    Lexington Observer & Reporter
    Louisville Courier
Louisville *Democrat*

Louisville *Journal*

Louisville *Courier-Journal*

Maysville *Eagle*

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Books


