Battle of Liberty Place

The "Louisiana Outrages", as illustrated in Harper's Weekly, 1874.

The Battle of Liberty Place was an attempted insurrection by the Crescent City White League against the legal Reconstruction state government on September 14, 1874, in New Orleans, where it was then based. Five thousand members of the White League, a paramilitary organization of the Democratic Party, made up largely of Confederate veterans, fought against the outnumbered Metropolitan Police and state militia. The insurgents held the statehouse, armory, and downtown for three days, retreating before arrival of Federal troops that restored the elected government. No insurgents were charged in the action. This was the last major event of violence stemming from the disputed 1872 gubernatorial election. Both the Democrat John McEnery and Republican William Pitt Kellogg claimed victory; the U.S. government supported Kellogg.

Among those injured in the fighting at Liberty Place was Algernon Sidney Badger, superintendent of the New Orleans Metropolitan Police. Born in Boston and a veteran of the Union Army, he had been living and working in New Orleans since the end of the war.\[1\]

In 1874 McEnery and his allies formed a "rump" legislature in New Orleans, then the location of state government. The paramilitary White League entered the city with a force of 5,000 to seat McEnery; they fought against 3500 police and state militia for control. The White League defeated the state militia, inflicting about 100 casualties. The insurgents occupied the state house and armory for three days, and turned out Governor Kellogg. In 1891, the city erected a monument to commemorate and praise the insurrection from the Democratic Party point of view, which at the time was in firm political control of the city and state and was in the process of disenfranchising most blacks. The white marble obelisk was placed at a prominent location on Canal Street. In 2015, New Orleans mayor Mitch Landrieu proposed removing the monument altogether.[2]

1 History

The “Battle of Liberty Place” was the name given to the insurrection by its white Democratic supporters, as part of their story of the struggle to overturn Republicans and the Reconstruction government. They viewed the government as corrupt and illegal.[3] In the election of 1872, John McEnery, a Democrat, was supported by a coalition of Democrats and anti-Grant Republicans, including Republican Gov. Henry C. Warmoth. Warmoth’s opponents in the Republican Party remained loyal to President Grant, and supported the Republican Party nominee, William Pitt Kellogg.

Governor Warmoth had appointed the State Returning Board, which administered elections; it declared McEnery the winner. A rival board endorsed Kellogg, who had charged election fraud because of the violence and intimidation that took place at and near the polls, as Democrats tried to suppress black voting. The legislature impeached Warmoth from office and removed him for “stealing” the election. The Lieutenant Governor P. B. S. Pinchback, became Governor for the last 35 days of Warmoth’s term. Both McEnery and Kellogg had inaugural parties and certified lists of appointed local officeholders. The federal government eventually certified Kellogg as the governor of the state.

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In an earlier violent incident related to the disputed election, in April 1873 the Colfax massacre occurred at the courthouse in Grant Parish, when a white militia attacked freedmen defending appointed Republican officeholders. This action was also related to political tensions between Democratic whites and Republican blacks. In Colfax, three whites and a total of 150 blacks were killed, at least 50 of the latter after having been taken prisoner.

Grant ordered General Philippe Régis de Trobriand, commanding the 13th Regiment, to the city to protect the state government from violence. On January 4, 1875, Governor Kellogg requested his aid to eject men from the legislature who had not been certified by the Returning Board. Trobriand entered the state house with some men at the governor’s request, and escorted the eight men out after they had each given speeches of objection. The Democrats never returned; they set up an alternate legislature meeting at the Odd Fellows Hall in the city. They were committed to their candidate, Francis T. Nicholls, as governor for the next two years. During the remaining period, the Republican gubernatorial claimant, Stephen B. Packard, and legislators effectively controlled only a small part of New Orleans. Conservative white Democrats outside the city supported Nichols.

Trobriand and his regiment stayed in the city until January 1877, when federal troops were withdrawn in the 1877 compromise.

1.1 Liberty Monument

In 1891, as the Democratic legislature passed laws that disenfranchised most blacks, the city government erected the Liberty Monument to “commemorate the uprising” of 1874 in the city. The monument was prominently placed in the neutral ground (median) near the foot of Canal Street. In 1932 inscriptions were added to the monument which attested to the battle's role in establishing white supremacy.

By the late 20th century after civil rights achievements, many residents, especially in the black and Italian American communities, objected to the monument as a symbol of racism. (White League veterans had led a mob that lynched eleven Sicilian men in 1891.) In 1974 the city government added a plaque at the foot of the monument; it acknowledged the history while officially distancing the City from the racist philosophy of previous generations.

In 1989 the monument was removed during major street work on Canal Street. Many residents opposed its being restored and replaced. The city tried to negotiate removing the inscriptions. Some people argued for the monument’s being restored at the original location. The content of the inscriptions was seldom discussed; rather, the issues were dealt with on technical grounds. Historic preservation officials argued for its replacement; others argued this was history that did not deserve continued commemoration.

In July 16 of 1993, the New Orleans City Council voted 6 to 1, to declare the monument a nuisance. It was taken to a warehouse, with the intention to move it to an indoor museum. They eventually allowed the monument to be installed at a less prominent location, a short distance off Canal Street (at the river end of Iberville Street) between the One Canal Place parking garage and a floodwall.

White supremacist David Duke cited the monument as a symbol of “white pride”, and in 2004 tried to stage a rally by it. The monument is frequently vandalized, the subject of anti-racist and anti-Nazi graffiti. It was
one of three monuments vandalized in March 2012, by a group that protested in an email against monuments celebrating white supremacy; they also were marking the deaths of three young African-American men killed under questionable circumstances. A local businessman led his staff in cleaning up the monuments; he said that after Hurricane Katrina, residents needed to build the city together.[7]

In July 2015, after the Charleston church shooting the previous month caused many southern states and communities to rethink the public display of Confederate symbols and monuments, New Orleans mayor Mitch Landrieu called for the Liberty Place monument and statues honoring Robert E. Lee and other Confederate notables to be removed from prominent public spaces,[8] explaining that “that's what museums are for.”[3] The idea drew both support and resistance, and the city council voted unanimously to hold public hearings to discuss the proposal.[9]

### 1.1.1 Inscriptions

The following inscription was added in 1932:

"[Democrats] McEnery and Penny having been elected governor and lieutenant-governor by the white people, were duly installed by this overthrow of carpetbag government, ousting the usurpers, Governor Kellogg (white) and Lieutenant-Governor Antoine (colored).

United States troops took over the state government and reinstated the usurpers but the national election of November 1876 recognized white supremacy in the South and gave us our state."

In 1974, the city government added an adjacent marker, which stated:

“Although the “battle of Liberty Place” and this monument are important parts of the New Orleans history, the sentiments in favor of white supremacy expressed thereon are contrary to the philosophy and beliefs of present-day New Orleans.”

When the monument was moved in 1993, some of the original inscriptions were removed, and replaced with new inscriptions that state in part:

“In honor of those Americans on both sides who died in the Battle of Liberty Place ... A conflict of the past that should teach us lessons for the future.”[4][10][11]

## 2 See also

- Brooks–Baxter War

## 3 References


[5] “Photos of monument to Battle of Liberty Place


[11] “Marker #34742, Monument to Battle of Liberty Place”, Historical Markers Database

## 4 External links


- Battle of Liberty Place Monument, Historic Marker Database

- Account of 2004 vandalism to monument, New Orleans Indymedia, June 2004
5 Text and image sources, contributors, and licenses

5.1 Text


5.2 Images


- **File:NOLAWhiteLeagueMonumentByTracks.jpg** Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/3d/NOLAWhiteLeagueMonumentByTracks.jpg License: CC BY 2.5 Contributors: Photo by Infrogmation Original artist: Infrogmation of New Orleans

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