

Proposal for Thesis:

The Effects of Political Newspapers on Interpretations

Of the Arkansas Militia Wars and Catterson's Raid on Center Point

By Thanksgiving of 1868, regions of Arkansas were in chaos. For nine months violence had ruled the state. The Ku Klux Klan had crossed into the state from Tennessee with the hopes of undermining the Republican presidential vote. The Republican governor General Powell Clayton felt he no longer had a choice. Immediately before the presidential election of 1868, Governor Clayton rejected voter registration in twelve counties. Appearing before the state legislature on November 4, 1868, Powell Clayton declared martial law in ten Arkansas counties. This number would later be increased to fourteen. With no federal aid, Governor Clayton organized a state militia of white and free blacks to eliminate the Klan in Arkansas. What resulted was a four month period of near open combat in Arkansas that would be labeled the Militia Wars.¹ On November 14th General R. F. Catterson's force of four companies of militiamen would clash with the "armed men" of Center Point, Arkansas. Two men would die and one would be wounded.² In the days, weeks, and months afterwards, accusations of militia violence would be published repeatedly in the *Arkansas Gazette*, then the chief voice of the Democratic Party in Arkansas.

The purpose of this paper is to propose the future research of the analysis by Democratic and Republican political newspapers of the events surrounding Center Point and the Militia Wars and determine their impact on public opinion of the Republican Party and Military Reconstruction in Arkansas. How did the newspapers' reports of events differ from the official reports? What could both sides have gained from their analysis of events? How did the stories

¹ Burnside, William H, *The Honorable Powell Clayton* (UCA Press, 1991) 32

² Worley, Ted R., "Major Josiah H. Demby's History of Catterson's Militia," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, no. 4 (Winter 1975): 203-211

they reported impact public opinion? The events of the Militia Wars, despite their importance in Arkansas history, have been more-or-less ignored by historians. Banished to a few paragraphs in Arkansas history textbooks and at most a few pages in a Reconstruction history, the effect the events of 1868-69 had on Arkansas history have been severely underestimated. Understanding the differences in the reporting of Republican and Democratic newspapers will help in the understanding of the chaotic political climate of Reconstruction Arkansas.

As mentioned before, the key source for research will be newspapers. At the time, the chief Democratic voice in Arkansas was the *Arkansas Gazette*. No single newspaper held such a claim for the Republican Party. For the Republican side of the story, the author will focus on four papers: *The Fort Smith New Era*, *The Mountain Echo*, the *Southern Shield*, and the *Morning Republican*. Issues are scattered, but all four have articles from 1868-69 available and will hopefully provide an alternative view to the *Gazette*. To better understand the histories of these newspapers, Michael B. Dougan has provided *Community Diaries: Arkansas Newspapering, 1819-2002*. The book contains a section on political newspapers in Arkansas as well as histories of many of the above-listed newspapers.³

To help establish a firm background, several books on Arkansas history are available. Carl H. Moneyhon's *The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on Arkansas* is a general history of the state through that time period and the political environment that resulted.⁴ Two books on the lives of the freed blacks in Arkansas are available: *Negro Militia and Reconstruction*, and *From Slavery to Uncertain Freedom*. Both books make mention of the

³ Dougan, Michael B., *Community Diaries: Arkansas Newspapering, 1819-2002* (Little Rock: August House Publishers Inc., 2003)

⁴ Moneyhon, Carl H., *The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on Arkansas: Persistence in the Midst of Ruin* (Fayetteville, AR: The University of Arkansas Press, 2002)

Militia Wars, though not extensively. More importantly, both books discuss the steps freed blacks took to protect themselves and maintain their freedom against overwhelming hostility.^{5 6}

The Arkansas Historical Quarterly provides several articles related to the Militia Wars, including publishes letters, military reports, and biographies of important individuals, such as D.P. Uppam, a militia leader.^{7 8 9 10 11} The personal papers of D.P. Uppam are available and will also prove helpful. In addition, the University of Arkansas has available the private letters of Powell Clayton. Also available are the records for the Arkansas General Assembly between 1868 and 1869. The United States Congress also commissioned a report regarding the affairs in Arkansas.¹² All of these should prove useful in establishing what really happened. The county records for Severe County will be helpful for primary sources, biased and unbiased, in regards to the battle at Center Point.

It will be nearly impossible to establish what actually happened at events like Center Point. All sides, including the Republican government, had a stake in public opinion. By comparing the articles in these papers and the accounts in other primary sources, one can get an idea of just how much was at stake. Understanding the histories and political affiliations of the major newspapers of the time will help explain why the accounts differ. Knowing a general history of Reconstruction in Arkansas shows what impact reporting had on the state's history.

⁵ Singletary, Otis A., *Negro Militia and Reconstruction* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1957)

⁶ Finley, Randy. *From Slavery to Uncertain Freedom: The Freedmen's Bureau in Arkansas, 1865-1869* (Fayetteville, AR: The University of Arkansas Press, 1996)

⁷ Wayne, Jeannie M. "D. P. Upham, Woodroff County Carpetbagger." *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* (Spring 2000) 59-75

⁸ Worley, Ted R., "Major Josiah H. Demby's History of Catterson's Militia," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, no. 4 (Winter 1975): 203-211

⁹ Worley, Ted R., "Letters to David Walker Relating to Reconstruction in Arkansas: 1866-1874," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, no. 4 (Winter 1957): 319-326

¹⁰ Buxton, Virginia, "Clayton's Militia in Sevier and Howard Counties," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, no. 4. (Winter 1961): 344-350

¹¹ Atkinson, J. H., "Clayton and Catterson Rob Columbia County," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, (Spring, 1962): 153-157

¹² United States Congress, *Affairs in Arkansas report* (Washington D.C., U.S. Govt. Print Off., 1874)

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