

This article was downloaded by: [University of Minnesota Libraries, Twin Cities]

On: 26 October 2011, At: 08:31

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



History: Reviews of New Books

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/vhis20>

A Review of "The Colfax Massacre: The Untold Story of Black Power, White Terror, and the Death of Reconstruction"

Boyd Cothran ^a

^a Yale University

Available online: 19 May 2011

To cite this article: Boyd Cothran (2011): A Review of "The Colfax Massacre: The Untold Story of Black Power, White Terror, and the Death of Reconstruction", *History: Reviews of New Books*, 39:3, 80-80

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03612759.2011.557961>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

defection from Czechoslovakia at the height of the Cold War. In these and many other passages, the reader will recognize profound connections between sport and society as a whole.

The book is not without its imperfections. Among a handful of minor errors are separate references on page 214 to the “three” and “five” jerseys retired by the University of Michigan program. Yankees fans will cringe to see Don Mattingly listed as “Dave” on page 252. Finally, although the author maintains objectivity throughout most chapters, he seems to favor the Celtics in the Lakers-Celtics chapter, as he lavishes Celtics coach Red Auerbach with (appropriate) praise but recognizes Laker coach Pat Riley for little more than his fancy suits. Such flaws are slight, however, and do not detract from the overall excellence of the book. Fans of any of the teams and athletes discussed in the book, as well as sports fans in general, will find this a compelling book.

KEVIN B. WITHERSPOON
Lander University
Copyright © 2011 Taylor & Francis

Keith, LeeAnna
The Colfax Massacre: The Untold Story of Black Power, White Terror, and the Death of Reconstruction
Oxford: Oxford University Press
240 pp., \$15.95, ISBN 978-0-19-539308-8
Publication Date: August, 2009

On Easter Sunday, 1873, in the town of Colfax, Louisiana, an all-black Republican militia fought a considerably larger group of white supremacists in a desperate battle for the Grant Parish courthouse. In the battle and massacre of prisoners that followed, between 70 and 165 freedmen and three white men were killed in what LeeAnna Keith calls, in her book *The Colfax Massacre: The Untold Story of Black Power, White Terror, and the Death of Reconstruction*, “the deadliest incident of racial violence in the history of the United States” (xviii). Although one may dispute Keith’s assertion as ignoring the country’s bloody history of racial violence toward American Indians (the Sacramento River Massacre, Bear River Massacre, Sand Creek Massacre, and the Massacre at Wounded Knee all

come to mind as deadlier examples of nineteenth century racial violence), her larger point that the 1873 massacre spelled the end of Radical Reconstruction is especially useful.

Keith begins her book with several meandering chapters that connect the events of 1873 with the region’s earlier history of Indian removal and the development of a plantation economy based on slavery during the 1830s and 1840s in the Red River area. Focusing almost exclusively on the experiences of Meredith Calhoun and his hunch-backed, francophone son William, she convincingly illustrates how a racial system of privilege was established and then dismantled by the end of the Civil War. Following the controversial election of 1872, tensions between the newly empowered black majority and local whites, who resented the ascendancy of Republican rule in Grant Parish (named in honor of then President Ulysses S. Grant), made violence nearly inevitable. The establishment of a slave-based economy in the region and the dynamic personalities of the Calhouns (William, for instance, persisted in acknowledging his mulatto wife Olivia Calhoun and their children, despite threats and pressures from white supremacists) make for a fascinating story. Keith’s oblique approach in the first half of the book, however, may try the patience of many readers.

The second half of *The Colfax Massacre* is more focused and deals with the massacre and its aftermath, chronicling the arrest, trial, and eventual acquittal of nine coconspirators charged with crimes associated with the massacre. In a particularly cogent chapter, Keith deftly narrates the poignant testimony of witnesses to the massacre, the eventual conviction of the coconspirators of murder, and the subsequent Supreme Court dismissal on technical grounds in laconic detail. Indeed, Keith is at her best when she argues that, in narrowly defining federal authority to enforce the Fifteenth Amendment in the South, the Supreme Court handed white Southerners their most powerful tool for undermining Reconstruction and controlling the black vote: violence.

Keith bookends her study with evocative discussions of how this episode of racial violence has been remembered or forgotten by white society. She provides close readings of two sites of memory: a roadside marker erected in 1951 that declares the “Colfax Riot . . . marked the end of carpet-

bag misrule in the South” (xii) and an eleven-foot obelisk dedicated on April 13, 1921, honoring the three white men “who fell in the Colfax Riot fighting for White Supremacy” (168).

This reviewer, however, was disappointed by Keith’s treatment of memory in general. Rather than explore the legacy of remembering racial violence in Grant Parish for what it might say about the nature of historical knowledge production itself, Keith treats these remembrances as self-evident demonstrations of power and a societal will to forget. Although these physical memorials are interrogated for the politics of their narrative, she never applies a parallel analysis to the numerous reminiscences, oral histories, and courtroom testimonies that form the evidentiary foundation of her study. Ultimately, her interpretation of the material is marred by a superficial and methodologically erratic engagement with critical theories of historical memory.

Although this book may appeal to a wide audience because of its lively prose and Keith’s talent for picking out gruesome details and jaw-dropping tidbits, its critical and theoretical interventions are few. That said, *The Colfax Massacre* is a welcome addition to a growing body of literature that explores the role of violence in the Reconstruction-era American South.

BOYD COTHRAN
Yale University
Copyright © 2011 Taylor & Francis

Wyman, Mark
Hoboes: Bindlestiffs, Fruit Tramps, and the Harvesting of the West
New York: Hill and Wang
336 pp., \$28.00, ISBN: 978-0-8090-3021-7
Publication Date: April 2010

Mark Wyman, an accomplished historian of immigration and migration, has written a new book focusing on migratory workers and the development of the American West. Looking at how workers arrived to take seasonal jobs, Wyman concentrates on the years between the railroad’s expansion into the West around the 1870s and the coming of the automobile in the late 1920s. With his emphasis on the role of agricultural workers, Wyman