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CARPETBAGGERS:
A REVISIONIST MODEL EVALUATION

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Introduction

The Reconstruction of the American South following the Civil War remains a tumultuous time in American history, yet one of the most important. Carpetbaggers, white Northerners who migrated to the American South after the Civil War and became Republican politicians, are seen traditionally as scheming men taking advantage of the war-torn country to amass wealth and politically empower themselves by manipulating freedmen and native Southern whites. ¹ Hundreds of these controversial Northerners profited from the agrarian and political displacement of the South, becoming politicians and often planters. Despised by disenfranchised ex-Confederates, they were often seen as the epitome of everything the South fought against in the Civil War, a sign of ultimate defeat: not only had the South unsuccessfully fought for secession from the North, but it had come under Federal military rule during Reconstruction, inundated with blue-coated soldiers and carpetbaggers. Well into the 1870s, however, carpetbaggers attempted to assimilate socially into Southern culture, taking up similar agrarian practices and experiencing the same crop failures and successes yielded by the region to Southerners. Many of these newcomers brought with them Northern ideals of rejoining the Union, moving on from the war, and supporting the enfranchisement of blacks. These Republican ideals, resisted by many white Southerners, spawned the bitterness against carpetbaggers seen in almost a century of history texts.

The enemies of carpetbaggers triumphed with the Compromise of 1877 that conceded the presidency to Republican Rutherford B. Hayes but withdrew Federal troops from the South, ending Reconstruction and the enforcement of racial equality. During the years leading up to this monumental event, carpetbaggers participated in and allegedly often controlled Southern governments, rallying blacks to assert their new social and political rights. From the “black and tan” constitutional conventions, named with that epithet for their inclusion of black politicians for the first time in history, to Northern individuals such as Henry Clay Warmoth, Harrison Reed, and Powell Clayton serving as governors of Louisiana, Florida, and Arkansas respectively, Republican politics angered white Southerners who later responded with the violence of the Ku Klux Klan and localized intimidation of scalawags, carpetbaggers, and freedmen. This violence remained commonplace after the fall of Reconstruction, undoing much of the civil rights and economic reform contributed by carpetbaggers—contributions generally overlooked through decades of contempt until recent research reexamined the character of these men with results defying traditional views.

Most Southern journalists during Reconstruction condemned the carpetbagger as corrupt and egocentric, preying on a hapless region and the enfranchisement of freedmen to gain political power. Historians to the 1960s largely embodied this prejudiced paradigm, most prominently by pioneering Reconstruction historian William Archibald Dunning and his contemporaries—known collectively as the Dunning School. Late twentieth century research,

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3 The “black and tan” conventions were conventions required by Congress to draft new constitutions for ten of the former Confederate states before they were to be restored to the Union. The resulting governments were largely controlled by Republicans. “Black and tan” was a pejorative term, often used by Southern white opponents to Reconstruction, referring to the conventions’ black and mixed-race delegates. Freedmen were former slaves and scalawags (also a pejorative term) were native Southern whites who supported Reconstruction.
however, spawned a revisionist perspective antithesis to this ideology.\textsuperscript{4} Revisionist historians since the 1960s generally portray carpetbaggers as men of greater virtue, seeking to stabilize the South and rebuild in the vision of Lincoln, reuniting Americans and leading states in rejoining the Union.\textsuperscript{5} Rooted in the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, more recent historians have reevaluated earlier racist viewpoints of prominent historians that dominated mainstream American education during the early twentieth century, and research in the last four decades has rewritten a much kinder, and more accurate, story of the carpetbaggers.

These polarized perspectives of carpetbaggers are separated by nearly a century of great social, economic, and racial change within America, yet the question still remains: what were carpetbaggers really like, and what were their motivations and contributions to the postwar South? Furthermore, does the revisionist perspective accurately portray them? Autobiographical works, newspapers articles from the Reconstruction era, and late twentieth century historical studies examining the roles and motivations of carpetbaggers align in favor of the revisionist perspective.

I have included a case study of extraordinary carpetbagger Marshall Harvey Twitchell to illustrate the life of one carpetbagger in the South. Twitchell, a Vermont native, came to Louisiana with the Union Army, served in the Freedmen’s Bureau, lived as a planter and Republican politician in Bienville and Red River Parishes, and finally was forced from his adopted home by terrorist White League violence—violence that left him near death and without his arms. Relying a great deal on Twitchell’s autobiography set against a backdrop of


blended historic studies by prominent historians including Eric Foner, Richard Nelson Current, and Ted Tunnell, this case study challenges the traditional image of carpetbaggers through analysis of Twitchell’s experiences in the South. Not all carpetbaggers shared Twitchell’s experiences, but in varying degrees their collective lives ran parallel.

The Carpetbagger Identity

Carpetbaggers were Northern white men who settled in the postwar South, a majority bringing Republican ideals to the regions in which they settled. Southern journalists and historians to the 1960s claimed virtually all carpetbaggers contrived to take advantage of new political opportunities under the 1867 Reconstruction Acts that enfranchised blacks and called for states of the former Confederacy to draft new constitutions and to rebuild their governments prior to readmission to the Union. The image of the carpetbagger as the conniving scoundrel toting his meager possessions in a carpet-bag southward to profit from black enfranchisement (and the disenfranchisement of ex-Confederates) typifies a small portion of the carpetbag population. This image is a product of political and social prejudice; in fact most carpetbaggers were middle class people with education and social mobility, and who settled in the South prior to the Reconstruction Acts. Most carpetbaggers arrived through the Union Army or Freedmen’s Bureau prior to 1867, when freedmen still lacked franchise and the prospects of political office were distant. Instead of seeking office, they viewed the South like the prewar West, a land for settlement and a new life.  

The “black and tan” constitutional conventions in Southern states opened up politics to carpetbaggers in 1867, and the ensuing propaganda circus forever tainted the image of these

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Northerners in the eyes of native Southerners. Some carpetbaggers were hungry for political opportunity, but the majority offered political experience and democratic ideals while viewing politics as an avenue for make a living.7 Of the 159 outside white delegates to the Black and Tan constitutional conventions, only twelve are known to have arrived after 1867, thus soundly debunking historiography decrying that all carpetbaggers came southward as political opportunists—if they had, they would have come after 1867, when political positions became available due to the enfranchisement of blacks.8 With the creation of new state governments, many carpetbaggers were elected to offices on Republican tickets, many by freedmen casting their first ballots—while disenfranchised ex-Confederates looked on from a position of impotence. Dunning historians charted this change in leadership of Southern states from the prewar Democratic to postwar Radical Republican as disastrous for Southern society, politics, and economics—overlooking the fact that carpetbaggers brought democratic ideals and a willingness to work with both whites and blacks.9

A final accusation of carpetbaggers is their collective corruption and embezzlement of funds for personal gain. Dunning historians held that this started with taking advantage of the enfranchisement of freedmen for political election on the Republican ticket. While corruption did occur at various levels of state governments, it is important to note that there was little change in overall corruption levels from prewar to Republican administrations in the South.

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7 Planters in the South, including carpetbaggers, experienced crop failures in 1866 and 1867. Politics offered escape from agrarian hardships and employment as new offices became available.

8 Hume, “Carpetbaggers in the Reconstruction South,” 320.

In fact, there occurred greater corruption and increase in the debt of Southern states in the Democratic post-Reconstruction governments than in those of Republicans.\textsuperscript{10}

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 178-183.
Marshall Harvey Twitchell: A Case Study

Vermont carpetbagger Marshall Harvey Twitchell is a prominent and controversial Reconstruction figure; a case study analysis of his life and career supports the revisionist perspective. Twitchell is both a typical and unique historical individual: a carpetbagger following hundreds of fellow Northerners to profit from the agrarian and political displacement of the South yet advocating civil rights, Reconstruction, and the law before economic gain. Twitchell gained power at the cost of his family, fortune, and eventually both his arms to White League terrorism in Louisiana—his story stands as one of the most remarkable of the “Tragic Era,” and is important in embodying the revisionist view of carpetbaggers in general.\(^{11}\) Examinations of Twitchell’s military career, his service as an officer of the Freedmen’s Bureau, his experience as planter, his career in Louisiana politics, and his experience with White League violence reveal him as an embodiment of the “revisionist” carpetbagger and as a man whose life strikingly paralleled the rise and fall of Reconstruction itself.

Military Career

Marshall Twitchell served a distinguished career in the Union Army during the Civil War, rising through the ranks to lead both white and black soldiers, and this experience was the catapult which propelled Twitchell into a life of serving both races after the war. He was born to a poor family in Townshed, Vermont in 1840, he worked as a teacher for several years, and then enlisted in the 4\(^{th}\) Vermont Regiment as war broke out in 1861. He rose

\(^{11}\) Harris, 224, notes a nickname of the Reconstruction as the “Tragic Era” by historians. This term was first widely used by Claude G. Bowers, The Tragic Era: the Revolution after Lincoln, published in 1929.
through the ranks through his leadership abilities, and his virtuous character is typified by his selfless gift of his own furlough to a fellow soldier who had a wife to visit.\(^\text{12}\)

Twitchell fought in several battles and skirmishes, falling grievously wounded in the head in the Wilderness Campaign in Virginia in May 1864. Disfigured and left for dead in a hospital tent, he forced himself onto a road where he was taken by baggage train northward to better hospitals and eventually home to recover in Vermont.\(^\text{13}\) He fully recovered from his wound and opted to return to combat, believing in the Union cause and qualifying through examination for captaincy. He achieved a commission as a captain in a black regiment, the 109\(^{th}\) Colored Troops—though such posting was often eschewed and ill-regarded by whites, and he embraced his commission and fought with distinction at Petersburg. Twitchell wrote that his troops were “splendid and perfect soldiers” in his autobiography, and throughout his account harbored no prejudice in commentaries on those he commanded.\(^\text{14}\)

Twitchell’s military career saw him rise to captaincy through the ranks, giving him a valuable understanding of enlisted men often misunderstood by many Northern officers, who often purchased their commissions. A lower-middle class soldier, Twitchell would later reflect this experience in his service as an officer, in which he proved both his tactical worth and his humanity toward his troops. While he fought Confederate soldiers, he refrained in his autobiography from speaking ill of them, instead summing up his service as a time of adventure.\(^\text{15}\) Most carpetbaggers were former Union veterans like Twitchell, leaders seeing


\(^{13}\) Ibid., 74.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 82.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 1.
the war-torn South as a land of opportunity. But leadership of black troops also exposed Twitchell to racial issues, prejudice, and fostered sympathies for freedmen that prompted his employment in the Freedmen’s Bureau after the war.\textsuperscript{16} Carpetbaggers like Twitchell often similarly had sympathies for freedmen develop through military service and service in the Freedmen’s Bureau following Appomattox.\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{Twitchell in the Freedmen’s Bureau}

As the 109\textsuperscript{th} left for service in Texas in 1865, Twitchell applied for a posting with the newly-formed Freedmen’s Bureau in Louisiana, where his career as a carpetbag public servant, planter, and politician was to be spawned. His service parallels that of many Freedmen’s Bureau agents, who left distinguished military careers to take positions helping rebuild the South after they had fought the Confederacy for four years. Twitchell was appointed agent and provost marshal to Bienville Parish, and journeyed up the Red River to the town of Sparta and his command of a post of Federal soldiers—black soldiers. The upper Red River region was notorious for violence, and it was no coincidence that Harriet Beecher Stowe set the brutal ending of \textit{Uncle Tom’s Cabin} on that very location. There were few places in Twitchell’s autobiography where he voiced his fears for the future, but his account of arrival in Sparta was one. He wrote about the shift from blacks serving as slaves to now being peace-keeping soldiers in the white community, and the Southern white hatred for them and the officer who commanded them at Sparta, Twitchell himself. “I am free to confess that had I known beforehand what my position was to be, I should have remained with my

\textsuperscript{16} Twitchell, 88.

\textsuperscript{17} Hume, “Carpetbaggers in the Reconstruction South,” 319.
regiment,” Twitchell wrote, conveying his trepidations in his new home, the turbulent postwar South.\textsuperscript{18}

The Freedmen’s Bureau employed a sizeable force of agents and spread them throughout the South. The commissioner, General Oliver Otis Howard, spoke of the Bureau in terms of a temporary solution and a limited fixture in the South, and cautioned his agents that “less government, consistent with assured security of life and liberty and property, the better….,” acknowledging that the postwar shift of power and social structure would not be immediately welcomed by white Southerners already embittered at the Republican administration.\textsuperscript{19} Twitchell realized his unpopular position and strived to get to know the people he served. A member of the Masons, he attended their meetings in Sparta and used this fraternal affiliation to reach the white men of his parish, thus avoiding the need to call formal meetings to inform the population of new laws Twitchell was bound to enforce, including the abolition of master-slave contracts and the illegality of corporal punishment.\textsuperscript{20}

His first case as provost marshal involved the beating of a freedman by his former master. Twitchell found both plaintiff and planter in the wrong, offset the penalties, and punished a lying freedman witness by forcing him to return home on foot instead of on the mule provided to him by the planter.\textsuperscript{21} Twitchell thus became known and respected for his equal treatment of both freedmen and whites in a community where he was expected to favor freedmen and to punish former Confederates. Twitchell’s fears of non-acceptance among

\textsuperscript{18} Twitchell, 91.

\textsuperscript{19} Howard A. White, \textit{The Freedmen’s Bureau in Louisiana} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1970), 16.

\textsuperscript{20} Twitchell, 92.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 93.
whites similarly abated as he later wrote that he “learned to respect them for their honesty, industry, and general law-abiding character.” In a dispute between a black soldier and a townsperson, Twitchell was defended by a citizen who fired on a deserting soldier when that soldier aimed his musket at Twitchell.  

Controversy, however, surrounded the motives behind the black soldier’s unpopularity and the white saloon-owner shooting him to death, yet a military court failed to bring the businessman to trial.  

This violence was not only the first against freedmen in the parish, but a harbinger of more grievous events to come. Twitchell soon found himself without troops as his detachment was ordered back to their regiment; he was also without commission as General Philip Sheridan routinely discharged Twitchell in April 1866 as military rule of Louisiana was turned over to civilian officials. Twitchell had recommended Unionists to offices in Bienville Parish, however he had no control with the loss of his command and his subsequent inability to protect freedmen and their schools from racist violence. He sent home two white female New Orleans teachers because he deemed the environment too dangerous for their welfare in the absence of troops, a chivalrous move given the tensions he faced.

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22 Twitchell, 95-96.

23 Private Wallace Harris reportedly struck a black card dealer and slandered white citizens in the saloon of Robert Love, who was also deputy sheriff. Love attempted to arrest Harris, but Harris produced a revolver and left the scene. On December 18, 1865 word got out that the townspeople were planning to attack the black troops in retaliation for Harris’s actions, and Love confronted Twitchell as Harris left the barracks with his equipment. Twitchell’s attempts to arrest Harris led the trooper to aim his rifle at Twitchell, and at that point Love fired his shotgun and killed Harris. Ted Tunnell, *Edge of the Sword: The Ordeal of Carpetbagger Marshall H. Twitchell in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 2001), 101-102. Twitchell remained unsure at the time he wrote his autobiography if Love saved his life or fired out of vengeance. Love was arrested but not taken to trial, and returned soon thereafter to his business.


25 Twitchell, 97.
Twitchell served the Freedmen’s Bureau as an agent conducting government affairs, not seeking fortune as the carpetbagger stereotypically did. He lived in a modest room at the courthouse and spent a great deal of time riding between farms to solve property disputes. Twitchell believed that he served his office dutifully, and reflected in his autobiography:

> I had for a number of months been in charge of the parish….Master, overseer, and slave had passed away, and all were legally on a perfect equality. This revolution I had successfully conducted in such a manner that the parish, before or since, has never seen an equal period of time so free from violence and crime.  

By the summer of 1866 when Twitchell left his office in Bienville Parish, he had only drawn his salary and not engaged in other business. As a Freedmen’s Bureau officer, Twitchell’s record thus continues to defy traditional views on the motives of carpetbaggers in the postwar South.

**Life as a Planter**

Marshall Twitchell’s extraordinary life as a carpetbagger changed as he left the Freedmen’s Bureau and became a Louisiana planter. Here, he also defied Southern tradition by marrying a Southern woman, a music teacher in the town of Sparta. Adele Coleman and Twitchell formed a friendship while staying at the same hotel, and Twitchell contended with her angry family, which removed Adele from Sparta as rumors of her courtship with him surfaced and shocked the community. Secretly, however, the two arranged for a messenger to carry letters between them. The Coleman family was rooted for generations in the parish and several were former Confederate soldiers. They greatly disapproved of Adele “openly receiving the attentions of the Yankee officer at Sparta.”

Adele, however, defied her

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26 Ibid., 98.

27 Ibid., 99-100; Tunnell *Edge of the Sword*, 109-110.
family’s wishes and Southern decorum, resisting her family’s wishes and marrying Twitchell on July 24, 1866—in his blue uniform, as per her wishes.28

Twitchell took a liking to Adele’s father, and assisted him in his finances and management of the family farmlands. He managed the Coleman properties to pay off the family’s debts, and soon was himself making money. This impressed the Coleman family and drew him, at last, into the fold.29 He became a planter with the purchase of his own plantation adjacent to the Coleman family’s, managing both his own and Coleman family finances—in exchange the Colemans managed the crops.30 He was extended credit in New Orleans based on his association with the Colemans, in order to purchase his plantation, further exemplifying Twitchell’s assimilation with his new countrymen. Twitchell then purchased Starlight Plantation on the nearby Red River near Coushatta Point in the spring of 1869, and there Adele gave birth to two sons: Harvy Twitchell died only some nine months later, and Marshall Coleman Twitchell remained healthy.31 Brother Homer and brother-in-law George King arrived from Vermont and settled to work at Starlight, followed soon by the remainder of Twitchell’s Vermont family in the fall of 1870.32

Twitchell is a rare case of a Northerner assimilated into Southern society—released from duties with the Army and Freedmen’s Bureau, he married into a prominent planter family and himself took up the Southern planter lifestyle, prospering to the extent that he lived comfortably and supported the migration of his relatives to join him in the South,

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28 Twitchell, 103.
29 Tunnell, Edge of the Sword, 118.
30 Twitchell, 106-7.
31 Tunnell, Edge of the Sword, 118. “Harvy” is the way the name is documented in Adele’s Bible and not a misspelled transcription.
32 Twitchell, 123-126.
employing laborers and embracing cotton as his economic base. This shift from government policing agent to middle-class planter was a significant chapter in Twitchell’s life. It was logical for a carpetbagger to embrace his surroundings based on economic opportunity, but in his case Twitchell had fulfilled his Freedmen’s Bureau duties before considering speculation on land and agriculture, and strove for acceptance before settling as a planter—again Twitchell defies the typical image of the greedy carpetbagger profiting from the war-torn South. However he did not reject his popularity—in his autobiography he wrote “my success seemed to give everybody a desire to deal with me; consequently, all the opportunities for making money in the country were put in my way.”

Twitchell in Politics

Marshall Twitchell enjoyed a short yet powerful career in Louisiana politics, and quickly became the most influential man in his parish, but as a Republican he eventually was also a threat to racist Southern white principles. In 1867 Congress adopted the Reconstruction Acts, and placed Louisiana under the military command of General Philip Sheridan, who was to oversee the drafting of a new state constitution, reorganization of the state government, and readmission to the Union.

Bienville Parish for the first time in its history registered all its voters, whites and freedmen, in preparation to elect a delegate to the constitutional convention. Twitchell warned freedmen of the danger of the Democrats who would “put them back in slavery if they could,” and also some Republicans, who “would crowd them

33 Ibid., 108.

forward into position so much faster than their education and experience in affairs of
government would justify,” a surprisingly moderate statement, reflecting an understanding of
politics from the perspective of his adopted parish and his new home.³⁵ Twitchell was then
nominated to represent Bienville Parish at the convention, and received a majority of both
freedmen and white votes—his status as a Republican favored the freedmen, but his marriage
and assimilation into the community allied him with whites and their interests, thus
establishing him as a uniting compromise candidate.

Twitchell is first to mention that he was not a politician, but he took an active role in
the framing of the new Louisiana constitution. He argued for education reforms and schools
for freedmen—an issue author William C. Harris labels the “cornerstone” of Republican
Reconstruction reform.³⁶ Twitchell also helped pass the constitution on March 7, 1868 amidst
a body dominated by blacks and carpetbag Northerners.³⁷ Southern white critics decried the
“Black and Tan” convention (so named because of its inclusion in the electorate of newly-
enfranchised freedmen) as the “Bastard” and “Nigger Convention,” as the Bossier Banner
cried out, “we want no negro suffrage—not negro jurors—nor negro governors—nor negro
officers of any kind.”³⁸ The constitution of 1868 passed, many believe, due to the

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³⁵ Twitchell, 108, and Tunnell, Edge of the Sword, 120. Twitchell (110) states he aligned as a
Republican because “I found all elements there friendly to the Union and all accepting the results of the war.”

³⁶ Harris (p. 213) also notes that most education reforms would later fail with the cessation of the
Reconstruction and the return of Democrats to power.

³⁷ The constitutional convention of 98 delegates was divided into fifty blacks, thirty-four native white
Southerners, and fourteen carpetbag Northern whites. Tunnell, Edge of the Sword, 121-4. Recent study by
Gough and Hume have revised the counts to fifty blacks, thirty-one Southern whites, fourteen carpetbaggers, two
unclassified representatives, and one native white representative who attended very few sessions and did not
vote. Gough and Hume, Blacks, Carpetbaggers, and Scalawags: The “Black and Tan” Conventions and the
Foundations of Radical Reconstruction, unpublished manuscript to appear from Louisiana State University Press
in spring 2008.

³⁸ Tunnell, Edge of the Sword, 124. Bossier Parish is adjacent to Bienville Parish.
disfranchisement of thousands of unrepentant ex-Confederates at the time by General Sheridan. Twitchell returned to his parish in less favor than when he had departed, owing to Southern white sentiment against the outcome of the constitutional convention and to new state laws giving additional rights to freedmen and whites. He nominated Unionists for local offices in his parish, and himself became parish judge.

During this time Twitchell noted the rise of white terrorism against freedmen and Republican whites—freedmen Moses Langhorne and Asa Sheea were separately brutally murdered in Bienville Parish by night riders, who also shot Republican sheriff candidate William Honneus in an attempt to sabotage the local elections, particularly the presidential election of 1868.

Twitchell himself then became a target for assassination attempts, and his autobiography relates a breathtaking recount of his night rides and stealthy travel tactics to avoid picketed roads and roaming assassins as he traveled on parish duties. He even once read his own obituary in the New Orleans Republican, presumptuously telegraphed by confident assassins. Terrorism, however, virtually ceased after the 1868 election, and Bienville Parish settled down with Twitchell serving his office as judge and planter. It was during this time, as noted previously, that his family joined him as he purchased Starlight Plantation on Lake Bistineau.

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39 Tunnell, Crucible of Reconstruction, 134.

40 Twitchell, 115-7. Tunnell in Edge of the Sword, 129-130, notes the Ku Klux Klan as an umbrella term for terrorist groups, and that no “official” known KKK organization was active in Louisiana at this time. One prominent group, known as the Knights of the White Camellia, however, committed a multitude of atrocities in the upper Red River parishes, including Bienville.

41 Twitchell, 119.
Twitchell was elected to the Louisiana senate in 1870 and took office the following year in New Orleans. There, he supported the creation of a new parish due to growing population, and quickly guided a bill through the state legislature which created Red River Parish in the summer of 1871.\(^{42}\) The new parish under Republican rule opened up new offices for Republicans to control—Twitchell, his relatives, and his allies quickly filled the majority of these in the rising town of Coushatta.\(^{43}\) This action took advantage of Twitchell’s position as senator and Republican power at the time, and is thus an example of a commonly criticized carpetbag practice. Twitchell, however, used his positions in the local government to benefit his black constituents, as well as to serve the white community. Filling the parish with white officers instead of freedmen satisfied white Southerners, and perhaps spared would-be freedmen officials from certain death at the hands of White Camellia riders. As school board president Twitchell opened segregated schools for whites and blacks. He also threatened not to pay white school teachers if black schools were burned, and this kept all the schools open and intact.\(^{44}\)

Twitchell asserted in his autobiography that under his organization and direction Red River Parish “entered upon an era of prosperity unequalled in Louisiana, if not in the whole South,” and historian Ted Tunnell affirms this: “to a remarkable degree he had made

\(^{42}\) Twitchell, 127.

\(^{43}\) Marshall Twitchell became president of the school board and president of the police jury (county court); his brother Homer Twitchell became parish recorder and tax collector; brother-in-law George King became chief constable, sheriff, and mayor of Coushatta; and brothers in-law Monroe Willis and Clark Holland also became officials along with many other Republicans. Tunnell, *Edge of the Sword*, 140-42.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 147-48.
Reconstruction work in Red River Parish.” Through a variety of offices he continued after his service in the Freedmen’s Bureau as an ambassador of equity, a link between freedmen and Southern whites, furthering the tradition of his military service. He gained powerful and plentiful enemies, but continued to serve the people he now called his own.

**Violence and Tragedy**

Twitchell’s final years in Louisiana were marred by tragedy as a long trail of violence spread across the South as renewed Ku Klux Klan terrorism witnessed murdered Republicans and freedmen, intimidated blacks from the polls, and violently backed Democratic candidates in the 1872 elections. The state Republican party splintered with former Louisiana carpetbag governor Henry Clay Warmoth using troops to fight Democratic opposition in New Orleans; new Republican governor William Pitt Kellogg came to power while facing an opposing Democratic state government across the city. Violence came to a head at Colfax, the seat of Grant Parish (southeast of Red River Parish) in April, 1873—there armed freedmen, fearing Democratic seizure of the local government, defended the town against a large force of armed white Southern vigilantes for three weeks before being overpowered. The victorious white Southerners then massacred the surrendered defenders, and in the single bloodiest altercation of the Reconstruction era, murdered over fifty freedmen. On hearing the news and fearing the same treatment for Red River Parish, Twitchell organized a defense of his locale and commanded a contingent of both blacks and whites—and though informed by local

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45 Twitchell, 129. Tunnell in *Edge of the Sword*, 151-52, notes the strong, thriving economy of Coushatta, a stable political climate, and a migration of freedmen to the parish for education and labor opportunities.

46 Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, 170-72.

Democrats that Twitchell would not be harmed and only a “few troublesome ‘niggers’ would be killed”—remained strong and maintained security until the threat passed without incident.

Adele Coleman passed away in February 1874 from tuberculosis, months after Marshall’s sister and George King’s wife Belle Hanna succumbed to yellow fever. Adele had given birth to a son, Daniel, but and the sickly infant died mere weeks after Adele.48 Strangely Twitchell did not mention either his son or Belle in his autobiography, and devoted a mere two sentences to his wife’s passing. Perhaps in his memory these events were harbingers for greater trials soon to come, for out of the Knights of the White Camellia had risen another terrorist organization, the White League, which aimed at undermining the Republican Kellogg administration through local terrorism.49

While Marshall Twitchell met with authorities in New Orleans in efforts to send Federal troops to restore order to the parishes of the upper Red River, White League supporters skirmished with freedmen in Coushatta in late August, 1874, and subsequently drove from town a group of Republican officials, including Marshall’s brother, Homer, and his brother-in-law Clark Holland. The Republicans were accosted under armed escort and with the promise that they would not return to the parish again.50 Across the parish boundary, however, a posse of White League riders overtook and brutally murdered the departing officials.51 The “Coushatta Massacre,” as the tragedy became known, obliterated Marshall

48 Tunnell, Edge of the Sword, 178-82.


50 Ibid., 288-89.

51 “The Southern Terror: Massacre of Northern Men in Louisiana,” New York Times, 2 September 1874, 1. Also “Murders in Louisiana: Parish Officers Arrested on the Pretext of Exciting a Mob—Taken from the Guard and Reported Shot,” New York Times, 1 September 1874, 1. The first report of the massacre claimed that the White League riders were Texans.
Twitchell’s power in Red River Parish, and destroyed the parish’s already precarious Republican control.\textsuperscript{52} White League reports greatly distorted the incident, speaking of a fictional gathering of “armed negroes between 300 and 400 in number” aided by Homer Twitchell and other Republican Coushatta officials, and asserted the White League courageously stopped what would have been a massacre of innocent white Southerners—and that somewhere along the way Texans killed the fleeing Republicans.\textsuperscript{53}

At the news of the Coushatta Massacre, Twitchell returned to Coushatta with troops and reestablished order, but constantly faced death threats and over the next weeks watched his political position under Governor Kellogg slowly disintegrate. He moved the remainder of his family back to Vermont in the summer of 1875, and his sister Kate (widow of Clark Holland) passed away in November of that year.\textsuperscript{54} He returned from Vermont the next January for the 1876 Louisiana legislature to decry Democratic seizure of the polls and to refute newspapers carrying out libel campaigns against his character and that of his party.\textsuperscript{55} Twitchell’s world crumbled in his adopted land as Reconstruction neared its end.

On the morning of May 2, 1876, Twitchell and brother-in-law George King left Starlight Plantation and took a ferry across the Red River to Coushatta. As the ferry neared its Coushatta landing a curiously disguised assassin opened fire on the skiff with a repeating rifle and then a pistol with incredible accuracy, wounding the ferryman, killing King, and

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\textsuperscript{52} The victims were: Homer Twitchell, Deputy Postmaster; W. F. Howell, U.S. Commissioner and attorney; Robert Dewees, De Soto Parish Tax Collector; Frank Edgerton, Sheriff; N. C. Willis, Justice of the Peace; Clark Holland, Red River Parish Register, and six freedmen. “The Southern Terror: Massacre of Northern Men in Louisiana,” \textit{New York Times}, 2 September 1874, 1.


\textsuperscript{54} Twitchell, 148-153, 161.

\textsuperscript{55} Foner, 551.
leaving Twitchell with a ball in his neck, one in his leg, and two bullets shot through each arm. After the ferryman (as instructed by Twitchell) called out that Twitchell was dead, the assassin mounted his horse and calmly rode out of Coushatta unchallenged.\textsuperscript{56} The ferryman, however, landed Twitchell on the opposite bank, where he was rushed to a friend’s house and surgeons fought for his life. They amputated both his arms and nursed him back to health under heavy guard in case assassins returned.

Congressional representatives from the Democratic U.S. House visited Twitchell to investigate his attempted assassination and the murder of King.\textsuperscript{57} Not surprisingly, given the Democratic control of the House of Representatives, they concluded that the attempt was not politically motivated. Furthermore, the investigators charged Twitchell had caused his own attempted assassination through mismanaging parish affairs and money. Interview evidence collected by the two congressmen, one an Ohio Democrat, was dominated by the testimonies of Twitchell’s enemies, six of whom had previously been arrested for participation in the Coushatta Massacre.\textsuperscript{58}

Twitchell’s friends moved him from Coushatta to New Orleans on a guarded boat, and from there he went north to Indianapolis, where his last surviving relative, his sister Helen, died. Twitchell, on his recovery, then returned to New Orleans and served out the rest of his senatorial term, lending final support to the Republican party before returning north for the final time. In Red River Parish, false allegations of fraudulent mismanagement of parish affairs and alleged illegal purchase of Starlight Plantation (brought forth by the previous

\textsuperscript{56} “Senator Twitchell’s Story,” \textit{New York Times}, 29 June 1876, 7. The original report, appearing on May 19 in the \textit{New York Times}, falsely stated that the assassin escaped “despite all efforts to capture him.”

\textsuperscript{57} The investigating congressmen were John Luther Vance (Ohio Democrat) and William Woodburn (Nevada Republican).

\textsuperscript{58} Twitchell, 176-79.
owner’s ex-wife) combined with Democratic courts (with little sympathy for Twitchell), had incurred him large debts. He lost Starlight Plantation, his Coushatta properties, and all other lands he owned.\textsuperscript{59} One of his last remaining friends, local planter and carpetbagger John Harrison, also fell to an assassin’s bullet in September 1878.\textsuperscript{60}

In April 1878 Marshall Harvey Twitchell accepted President Rutherford B. Hayes’ appointment as consul to Kingston, Canada, where he served for twenty-seven years until his death in 1905. His properties and arms were gone, his family deceased, his friends murdered, his political party out of power in Louisiana, and the Reconstruction that he embodied and served was past and largely nullified. It was, in Twitchell’s words, “a life of success, failure, and tragedy, all in seventeen years.”\textsuperscript{61}

\textit{Legacy}

Marshall Harvey Twitchell lived an extraordinary life strikingly parallel to the Reconstruction era itself. As a carpetbagger Twitchell served faithfully the Reconstruction dream, overseeing the enfranchisement of freedmen and reuniting the United States of America and the South—a region plagued by centuries-old racist traditions, and witnessing the violence that overturned the Reconstruction era by the mid 1870s. Like most carpetbaggers, Twitchell did find profit in the South—but he did so after distinguished service in the army (in a black regiment no less) and Freedmen’s Bureau. His marriage to Adele Coleman joined him with a prominent white Southern planter family, and his biracial and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{59} Tunnell, \textit{Edge of the Sword}, 286-290.
\item \textsuperscript{61} Twitchell, 199.
\end{itemize}
bipartisan election as state senator from Bienville Parish, speaks to the rare general 
acceptance Twitchell achieved as a carpetbagger during the early years of the Reconstruction. 
His political career further exemplifies his role as a prominent figure in Louisiana history, and 
in Reconstruction history itself.

Postscript: Carpetbagger Propaganda—A Century of Misinformation

Southern journalists played a key role in reestablishing a distinctly “Southern” post-
Civil War identity, a standard to rally a region and people in defeat. Finding foundation in 
prewar ideologies and fuel in the 1867 Congressional nullification of Andrew Johnson’s 
postwar Southern governments, Southern white journalists saw this nullification as a Southern 
victory and reinforcement of the traditional views condemning blacks’ participation in 
government. The failure of Radical Reconstruction collectively ended Federal aid programs 
and protection of Republican sympathizers in the South. Because the Freedmen’s Bureau did 
not redistribute land to ex-slaves, freedmen were left dependent on white landholders, and 
new post-Reconstruction Southern governments nullified the previous legitimacy of 
governmental bodies inclusive of blacks.  

Federal troops pulled out and took with them 
Republican idealism, paving the way for corruption, racism, and Ku Klux Klan violence on an 
unprecedented scale.

Influential Southern newspapers such as the Montgomery Daily Mail openly criticized 
Reconstruction, embodying Southern hatred for newcomers and their Southern sympathizers, 
both white and freedman. The labels “carpetbagger” and “scalawag” (a term previously used 
to describe inferior farm animals; scalawags were Southern white Republicans) were

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developed and widely used in Southern journals. Historian Ted Tunnell recognizes the lasting impact of this labeling as “a stroke of rhetorical genius because its protean symbolism played in both North and South and undermined radical policy on multiple levels.”63 The New York World harshly criticized carpetbaggers for its Northern Democratic readership:

> Few know where they come from; nobody knows how they live...but here they are buzzing about like gad-flies, and seeking the weak points in the country with the unerring instinct of carrion crows. Hounded out of the North for rascality...they seek and obtain employment in the cause of Reconstruction...such is the carpet-bagger. A man who has no stake in the country beyond his satchel, and yet, by the grace of Reconstruction, the ruler of the State.64

Carpetbaggers appeared an easier literary target than scalawags, for perhaps Southern writers feared the long-term alienation of influential Southerners and thus focused criticism on Northerners. A large percentage of carpetbaggers originated from New England, leading to the creation of an anti-New England standard for literary attacks; in attempts to discredit Radical Reconstruction, journalists widely portrayed carpetbaggers as “Ichabod Cranes,” weak, sneaky, and possessed with Puritan fanaticism.65

William Archibald Dunning, renowned late nineteenth century historian and professor from Columbia University, proved one of the most influential writers of Southern history during his day. Though from New Jersey himself, Dunning wrote extensively from the South’s perspective, and his texts influenced mainstream education for nearly eighty years in what was called the Dunning School of thought on the events of Reconstruction. In so doing, he continued to popularize the terms “carpetbagger” and “scalawag,” embodied racist views condemning literacy and social mobility of blacks, criticized Southern whites supporting Radical Reconstruction, and condemned carpetbaggers in the vein of Southern Reconstruction

63 Ibid., 822.
64 Ibid., 800.
65 Ibid., 818.
journalists.\textsuperscript{66} Of black enfranchisement Dunning wrote the freedmen “exercised an influence in political affairs out of all relation to their intelligence or property,” of scalawags, “a class which lacked the moral authority to conduct government.” After condemning the dishonest practices and demeanor of carpetbaggers, Dunning, however, contradictorily undermined his own evaluation with the conclusion that they left the South en masse when they realized that “making an honest future” was impossible.\textsuperscript{67}

Historian, Democrat, and US ambassador to Spain and Chile, Claude Bowers was one of the most influential writers of the Dunning School. His 1929 book \textit{The Tragic Era} focused his fiery writing on the targets identified by Dunning: carpetbaggers, freedmen, scalawags, and the Republican Party. He saw carpetbaggers as undercover Republican agents plotting to “accentuate the distrust and hatred of the races,” while securing the votes of freedmen by teaching them (through the Freedmen’s Bureau) to hate Southern natives and traditions. Bowers amplified Reconstruction anecdotes, rumors, and myths as factual generalizations to discredit Reconstruction and the parties involved; accordingly, he attributed a disrupted postwar economy to Northerners taking freedmen from the fields to vote and denounced the Freedmen’s Bureau as Republican Party organization on the government payroll. He was particularly harsh in his treatment of “abandoned whites,” the carpetbaggers of whom he wrote “mingled familiarly with the negroes, day and night” and “danced with negro women,” accusations strongly embodying the racist, segregationist view of his time.\textsuperscript{68}


The earliest detailed studies of the Reconstruction era, the Dunning School interpretation of Reconstruction embodied Dunning’s own and the widely-accepted views of historians that dominated mainstream education until the 1930s.69 “Political parasites and looters, scalawags and scavengers, knaves and fools, took possession of the [Southern] State Governments, and entered upon the pillaging of the stricken people,” students were taught for decades, racist and prejudiced propaganda rooted in the Dunning School and antebellum Southern tradition.70 This mainstream perception found its way into popular culture as well, including Margaret Mitchell’s book Gone With the Wind and in its subsequent 1939 screenplay. Not until the 1950s and 1960s spawned the Civil Rights movements and the Revisionist perspective did history books generally reconsider the Dunning School.

A handful of early historians presented balanced evaluations of carpetbaggers and their contributions to the Reconstruction South, but the Revisionist perspective grew in acceptance only during the latter half of the twentieth century. Dunning School author Walter L. Fleming recognized some benevolent qualities of carpetbaggers in 1906, including in his Documentary History of Reconstruction a document praising carpetbaggers’ contributions to the principles of freedom. Robert Selph Henry’s 1938 Story of Reconstruction presented an account of carpetbaggers balanced with considerably less prejudice and racism than other scholars of his time, but these volumes were exceptions to the dominance of the Dunning School. Black historian W. E. B. Du Bois’ 1935 book, Black Reconstruction, took a revolutionary look at Reconstruction through Marxist and racial lenses and is one of the first revisionist works on the era. Dunning historians, however, paid little attention to the work of

69 Pressly, 81.
70 Bowers, 219.
Du Bois and his challenge for reevaluation of Reconstruction did not gain acceptance until about the time of his death in 1963.\footnote{Foner, xxi.}

In the early 1960s, historians Jack B. Scroggs and Kenneth Stampp were among the first proponents of the Revisionist perspective on carpetbaggers and, more broadly, on Radical Reconstruction. Carpetbaggers “took the lead in providing for the South a democratic political structure,” Scroggs argued (1950s and 1960s), noting how historians continued to mask the contributions of carpetbaggers behind racially-charged myths.\footnote{Jack B. Scroggs, “Carpetbagger Constitutional Reform in the South Atlantic States 1867-1868,” \textit{Journal of Southern History} 27 (November 1961), 493.} Stampp’s \textit{The Era of Reconstruction} (1965) methodically refuted Dunning scholars, rewriting the story of Reconstruction from the Revisionist perspective. Stampp acknowledged that carpetbaggers went South for a variety of reasons, some dishonest, but identifies with substantial historical evidence the carpetbagger as the most important political, social, and economic stabilizing force in Reconstruction years and most importantly an early force in Southern history to attempt to give blacks full civil and political rights.\footnote{Stampp, 157-185.}

The latter half of the twentieth century has seen growing support of the Revisionist perspective through many prominent historians; however this has yet to gain widespread public acceptance. Historians Eric Foner, Richard Nelson Current, and Ted Tunnell stand prominent among the ranks of Reconstruction scholars, presenting balanced works treating carpetbaggers with the unbiased scrutiny denied in the century following the Civil War.
Revisionist perspectives on carpetbaggers acknowledge that indeed many sought economic and political advancement in the former Confederacy, yet men like Twitchell exemplify that the carpetbagger did not exploit freedmen for personal gain. Twitchell was a “model” carpetbagger who supplied leadership, idealism, and belief in a united nation when called upon by the Federal government to reconstruct the Union. Carpetbaggers like Twitchell lived as middlemen in a polarized world of freedmen and Southern whites, enduring defaming propaganda and violence. “These individuals and corporations are your very best people,” Louisiana Governor Henry Clay Warmoth wrote of carpetbag politicians, countering the Southern white viewpoint that carpetbaggers should be held “responsible for all the woes from which our people have so long suffered.” Today Twitchell appears in numerous publications, and recently his story merited prominent feature in the recent PBS documentary *Reconstruction: The Second Civil War.*

Artist Blanche Butler Ames, the wife of Mississippi carpetbag governor Adelbert Ames, wrote during Reconstruction, “when the history of this country is written some fifty or a hundred years hence, the only interesting events of this present time will be the events which have been and are taking place in the South, and the motives which prompted all the actors in them. Your record will be a pure and prominent one.” Carpetbaggers like Marshall Twitchell served the interests of freedmen, and in politics fought for cohesion, education, and other reforms that would mold the Southern states closer to the image of their

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74 Hume, 316-317.


77 Harris, 224.
northern neighbors. Parallel with the decline of Radical Reconstruction in the 1870s and similar to other carpetbaggers, Twitchell lost all he had fought for, finding himself alienated again from a land he had embraced as his own. Union soldier, Freedmen’s Bureau agent, politician, planter—Twitchell led an extraordinary life hardly typical of the Dunning School carpetbagger who went southward only seeking fortune.

Twitchell sought a brighter future for all Americans with a new beginning for himself, risking his family, livelihood, and his own life because he had faith in the rebirth of a Louisiana with equality, promise, and peace. These were not destined to be—Twitchell left the South without his arms, money, and family; Radical Republicans fell from favor; and Reconstruction itself failed. Twitchell is a controversial figure, a courageous and prominent player in Louisiana Reconstruction who followed the American way to seek a new life while championing the ideals of liberty. For a century Dunning School ideology clouded the historiography of carpetbaggers with racial and regional prejudice, and only in recent decades has the revisionist perspective penetrated Dunning’s propaganda in a reconstruction of the carpetbagger image. There remains much to be studied as research peels away years of wrongful interpretation, but the revisionist perspective holds such promise.
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