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Civic Memorials

Honoring our past to educate future Generations



COLFAX MASSACRE MEMORIAL

Following the Civil War, the United States entered a period of intense social, political, economic, and racial conflict known as Reconstruction. Central to this struggle was often violent white supremacist resistance to the right of newly emancipated Black people to vote and hold office. The Colfax Massacre, which occurred near this site on April 13, 1873, was a crucial episode in this story. The bloodiest one-day event of Reconstruction, it had long-lasting legal and political repercussions for Louisiana and the entire country.

On that Easter Sunday, approximately 140 heavily armed white men from Grant and surrounding parishes, led by ex-Confederate officers, attacked a roughly equal number of Black men at the courthouse in Colfax. The attackers intended to install local officials whom they had tried to elect through fraud the previous November. The Black men had assembled, with what weapons they owned or could hastily improvise, in defense of the parish's rightfully elected officials, white and Black, who favored greater racial equality.

The courthouse the freedmen were trying to protect, like the territory of Grant Parish itself, had formerly been part of one of the South's largest plantations. Only a few years earlier most of the Black defenders had been enslaved on that land. Intent on securing their hard-won new freedom, they were also protecting their families, who had sought refuge in Colfax days before white supremacist gunmen murdered a Black farmer, Jesse McKinney.

On the morning of April 13, 1873, the federal government delivered an ultimatum to the courthouse shortly after the massacre. For two days, the courthouse was under construction with the help of Black men.

them buried in the trench around the courthouse. This mass grave lies under present-day downtown Colfax.

The Colfax Massacre's exact death toll may never be known. Records of subsequent U.S. government investigations suggest a conservative estimate that between 62 and 80 Black men lost their lives that day. These murders on April 13, 1873 made up just part of a wave of terrorist violence against African Americans during the post-Civil War years that killed thousands of people. Including victims of the Massacre, more than 100 perished during Reconstruction in what is now Grant Parish.

Invoking new civil rights laws, the federal government under President Ulysses S. Grant tried to bring the authors of the Colfax Massacre to justice. Insufficient resources hampered the prosecution, as did active resistance from many in central Louisiana who sympathized with the perpetrators. Eventually, nine men were arrested and stood trial in a federal court at New Orleans. In June 1874, a jury convicted three based on testimony from survivors and other Black witnesses, including women, who courageously told the story of threats and intimidation.

The Supreme Court of the United States largely upheld the limited victory for justice and the rule of law on March 23, 1875, in the landmark case, United States v. Cruikshank, which reversed the three convictions and set the precedent that the federal government could not prosecute individuals for threats and intimidation.



Colfax Massacre Memorial

Colfax, LA

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Rev. Avery Hamilton and Dean Woods are two men from different backgrounds who have come together to honor the legacy of the Colfax Massacre, a dark event in American history that occurred in 1873 in Grant Parish, Louisiana. The massacre, which resulted in the deaths of over 60 Black men who were asserting their constitutional rights, has largely been forgotten in the mainstream historical narrative. Now it never will be.

The Colfax Memorial Organization's Mission:

"The Mission of the Colfax Memorial Organization is to fund, create and dedicate a fitting memorial for the men who fought for freedom that fateful day. Funds raised over the cost of the memorial will be used to provide scholarships for African American students in Colfax who desire to attend college and establish meaningful careers."

