

## Killing Butler's Bloodhounds: An Act of Political Violence by Iowa Soldiers in Reconstruction South Carolina

Cormac Broeg  
*University of Iowa*

ISSN 0003-4827

Copyright © 2019 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution.

---

### Recommended Citation

Broeg, Cormac. "Killing Butler's Bloodhounds: An Act of Political Violence by Iowa Soldiers in Reconstruction South Carolina." *The Annals of Iowa* 78 (2019), 131-157.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.12562>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

# Killing Butler's Bloodhounds: An Act of Political Violence by Iowa Soldiers in Reconstruction South Carolina

CORMAC BROEG

ON THE MORNING of May 22, 1865, more than a month after General Robert E. Lee surrendered to General U. S. Grant at Appomattox, a band of Iowa soldiers left their encampment on Shultzzer's Hill east of the town of Hamburg, South Carolina, across the Savannah River from Augusta, Georgia. The night before had brought heavy rain, but the veterans of two years of war walked two miles to their destination: a plantation with a large brick house and an impressive peach orchard. On a previous visit to the orchard, some of their comrades had discovered a kennel of bloodhounds trained to pursue enslaved people, and Robert Butler, the owner of the plantation, had threatened to sic the dogs on them. In the three days since the Iowa regiments had arrived in South Carolina, rumors had spread among the men that the Confederate government had employed Butler and his bloodhounds to pursue escapees from prisoner-of-war camps. Private Ephraim Blake, one of the Iowa soldiers at the plantation that morning, later wrote, "We resolved these dogs must die and Butler too if he monkeyed with us." With tri-sided bayonets affixed to their rifles, the soldiers performed their bloody task. As a wrathful Butler hurled expletives, they killed every dog in the pack with bullets and bayonet thrusts. "When the battle was over in

---

THE ANNALS OF IOWA 78 (Spring 2019). © State Historical Society of Iowa, 2019.

the peach orchard," an officer later recalled, "the ground looked as if it had rained . . . a plain shower of blood hounds."<sup>1</sup>

After the attack, Robert Butler, lodged a complaint with the Iowa soldiers' brigade commander. He claimed that the animals had been worth \$23,000 (equivalent to \$345,000 in 2015) and demanded restitution from the government. The army officers allowed him to visit the camp to identify the perpetrators so they might face military justice. The three Iowa regiments assembled on a makeshift parade ground so the face of each man could be clearly seen.<sup>2</sup> Those faces bore little sympathy for Butler's loss. Captain William Rigby wrote in his diary, "Few regret the death of [Butler's] dogs. Neither would his death be lamented by us." As Butler moved along the line of men in blue, the Iowa soldiers began to make their feelings known. Some "began to bawl like dogs," while others threatened to hang him. Afraid for his life, Butler fled to his buggy. Accounts diverge about what happened next. Two officers of the regiments described Butler's immediate departure, but Blake recalled that Butler's buggy was overtaken by an angry mob of soldiers eager to cut loose the horses in an attempt to send the buggy rolling off the steep hill—an attempt foiled only by the timely intervention of regimental officers.<sup>3</sup>

In the following days, guards were appointed to protect the Butler plantation from future visitors. The only mention of the incident in official military sources is the assignment of soldiers as a "safeguard for Butler" on order of their brigade commander.

---

1. E. E. Blake, *A Succinct History of the 28th Iowa Volunteer Infantry* (Belle Plaine, 1896), 81–82; S. C. Jones, *Reminiscences of the Twenty-Second Iowa Volunteer Infantry* (Iowa City, 1907); Samuel D. Pryce, *Vanishing Footprints: The Twenty-Second Iowa Volunteer Infantry in the Civil War*, ed. Jeffrey C. Burden (Iowa City, 2008), 220–26. Most information about the actual killing of the dogs comes from the postwar accounts of Ephraim Blake, Samuel Pryce, and Samuel Jones. All three accounts were written during the reconciliatory period after Reconstruction when veterans' accounts often obscured their wartime opinions of their enemies and sanitized the struggle. For conclusions about the soldiers' political opinions, this work relies primarily on the wartime correspondence of soldiers and media published before, during, and immediately after the conflict. David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA, 2001).

2. Blake, *A Succinct History*, 81–82; Pryce, *Vanishing Footprints*, 220–26.

3. William Titus Rigby, *Diary*, 5/22/1865, William Titus Rigby Collection, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines (hereafter cited as SHSI-DM); Blake, *A Succinct History*, 81–82; Pryce, *Vanishing Footprints*, 220–26; Jones, *Reminiscences*, 103–5.

There is no record of any court martial proceeding concerning the events of that day; none of the soldiers were ever charged for the killing of the dogs.<sup>4</sup>

A study of the political opinions espoused by the soldiers of the three Iowa regiments on Shultzzer's Hill and the wider context of May 1865 reveals the significance of the bloodhound killings as an act of political violence. To the Iowa soldiers, Butler was a member of the slaveholding planter class, the enemy from whom, as free laborers clad in the blue coats of citizen-soldiers, they had saved the republic. Bloodhounds were weapons used by slaveholding planters to brutally assert their power over their captured comrades. More than merely an act of revenge on behalf of the bloodhounds' blue-coated victims, the act of killing Butler's bloodhounds was a bloody repudiation of slaveholder power in a reunited nation.

THE THREE IOWA REGIMENTS encamped on Shultzzer's Hill on May 22, 1863—the 22nd, 24th, and 28th Iowa Volunteer Infantry Regiments—shared a history. Each had drawn its men from the farms and small towns of eastern Iowa, seen its first heavy fighting in the campaign for Vicksburg, and participated in the disastrous Red River Campaign before traveling east to fight under General Sheridan in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley. In January 1865, the already exceptionally well-traveled infantry regiments traveled by steamer to the conquered city of Savannah, Georgia. From there, they traveled up the Savannah River to Augusta and camped on Shultzzer's Hill across the river in South Carolina.<sup>5</sup>

The three Iowa regiments had not participated in Sherman's march through South Carolina or the destruction it wrought. Until that morning at Butler's plantation, relations between the Iowa regiments on Shultzzer's Hill and the surrounding community had been amicable.<sup>6</sup> Captain Rigby of the 24th Iowa wrote

---

4. "Morning Reports: Companies A to E," in 24th Iowa Infantry, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Group 1088 in Court Martial Case Files, National Archives, Washington, DC.

5. Blake, *A Succinct History*; Pryce, *Vanishing Footprints*; Jones, *Reminiscences*; Simeon Barnett, *History of the Twenty-Second Regiment Iowa Volunteer Infantry* (Iowa City, 1865).

6. Blake, *Succinct History*; Jones, *Reminiscences*; Pryce, *Vanishing Footprints*; A. B. Cree Letters, University of Iowa Digital Library, <http://digital.lib.uiowa.edu/>

in his diary that the only depredation the Iowans committed in South Carolina was the attack upon that “desperado’s house in the vicinity.”<sup>7</sup> The official records do not contradict Rigby’s statement. There is only one court martial case in 1865 concerning interactions between the three Iowa regiments and Southern civilians: a soldier from the 24th Iowa was convicted of his role in a scheme to sell army hay to the townspeople of Savannah.<sup>8</sup>

Enlisted men remembered their time in Hamburg as one of flirtation with local girls looking for “beaux.” The Sunday before the dog killing, officers of the 22nd Iowa crossed the river to attend church in Augusta, worshipping alongside paroled Confederate soldiers. Other officers attended balls where they rubbed shoulders with local planters, including Robert Butler. Captain Rigby wrote that Butler “has taken an oath of allegiance to the old flag since he can do it no more harm with safety to himself; associates with our leading officers, drink[s] with them and is a very fine man.” Despite Butler’s friendly association with some of their officers, however, the enlisted men included “a few boys with more ideas of justice than respect for high officials or the Southern mogul.”<sup>9</sup>

Only one of those boys, Ephraim Blake, identified himself (in a later account) as one of Butler’s morning visitors. Although Samuel Pryce, Adjutant of the 22nd Iowa, did not participate himself in the killings, his memoirs provide a detailed account of the slaughter. Pryce identified three participants in the killing: William Franklin, Alexander Moreland, and John Yarick. Like Blake, Moreland and Yarick belonged to Company E of the 28th; Franklin served in Company F of the 22nd. Like most of their comrades in the three Iowa regiments, all four men had emigrated to Iowa from free states (three were born in Ohio; Moreland was a

---

cdm/compoundobject/collection/cwd/id/22505/rec/1; *Dear Catharine, Dear Taylor: The Civil War Letters of a Union Soldier and His Wife*, ed. Richard L. Kiper (Lawrence, KS, 2002); John Walker Lee Collection, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City (hereafter cited as SHSI-IC).

7. Rigby, *Diary*, 5/22/1865.

8. Group 1088 in Court Martial Case Files, Records of the Office of the Judge Advocate General, National Archives.

9. Blake, *A Succinct History*, 81–82; Pryce, *Vanishing Footprints*, 215–26; Jones, *Reminiscences*, 103–5; Rigby, *Diary*, 5/22/1865; Blake, *A Succinct History*, 81–82.

native Pennsylvanian). All four were farmers by occupation who enlisted in their early twenties; the oldest, Franklin, had enlisted at the age of 22. Three of the four lived in Johnson County; Blake's family farm was in neighboring Iowa County.<sup>10</sup>

These four men cannot be collectively described accurately as regimental troublemakers. Two were non-commissioned officers. John Yarick had mustered into the army as a first corporal and received a promotion to third sergeant in the aftermath of the siege of Vicksburg. After suffering a minor wound at the Battle of Fisher's Hill in the Shenandoah Valley, he recovered in time to fight at Cedar Creek less than a month later. Alexander Moreland, one of three Pennsylvania-born Morelands in his company, had mustered in as a third corporal and suffered a leg wound at the Battle of Third Winchester. A superior described him in the company descriptive book with a relatively common platitude – "worthy of the name of soldier and an honor to the Co., always performing his duty" – and then added the more unique "indubitable and sociable."<sup>11</sup>

The killing of "slave-catching dogs" by Union soldiers was not an unprecedented act. The *Iowa City Weekly Republican*, the newspaper of choice for the men of the 22nd and 28th Iowa, reported that, during Sherman's March to the Sea, "wherever our army has passed everything in the shape of a dog has been killed" to protect "negroes and our escaped prisoners."<sup>12</sup> These dog killings were justified as acts of war, if not ordered, then at least sanctioned by officers. An Illinois soldier under Sherman's command in Georgia later remembered his regiment being issued an order "to kill all bloodhounds and other valuable dogs in the country." In 1865 an Iowa newspaper presented a killing of bloodhounds as part of a plan of retributive justice for the abuses of slavery. According to the newspaper account, a group of Union soldiers and formerly enslaved people killed all the dogs on a plantation before burning down the house and tying the slave-owner himself to a tree to be flogged by his former slaves. No

---

10. 22nd Iowa Infantry, 24th Iowa Infantry, and 28th Iowa Infantry in Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, National Archives.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Iowa City Weekly Republican*, 1/4/1865.

formerly enslaved person is mentioned as participant or instigator in accounts of the killing of Butler's bloodhounds, and there is no evidence that the attack was ordered by Iowa officers. There was no wartime exigency on May 22, 1865.<sup>13</sup>

The actions of Butler's morning visitors should be understood within the context of this political landscape. The desire to avenge the use of bloodhounds against prisoners of war bore a sociopolitical charge. Although the original encounter between the Iowa soldiers and the dogs sprang from a foraging expedition, the killing of the dogs was not merely a means to steal peaches. Blake's account makes it clear that the killing of Butler's dogs was the band's objective that morning.<sup>14</sup> Butler's earlier threat spoke to the soldiers' class consciousness and political ideology. As historian Robert Darnton argues in *The Great Cat Massacre*, an act of violence against animals can be a social statement. The significance of killing Butler's bloodhounds, like that of cat murders committed by eighteenth-century Parisian apprentices, can only be fully appreciated by first understanding the perpetrators' perspectives on the political climate in which the act was committed.<sup>15</sup>

ROBERT J. BUTLER lived in the southwest of South Carolina's Edgefield District. In 1860 the Edgefield District was South Carolina's leading cotton producer and second only to Charleston in total value of real and personal property. The majority of its population was enslaved. In the antebellum period, the district was home to politicians with national reputations as fierce defenders of slavery, including Senator James Henry Hammond, Congressman Preston Brooks, and Senator Andrew Preston Butler.

Although the Iowa soldiers in 1865 may have believed that Robert was a relative of Senator Butler, Robert was not a member of the Butler dynasty long prominent in South Carolina politics. Robert had been born in 1815 to a slaveholding family that had

---

13. *Iowa City Weekly Republican*, 1/4/1865; Matthew H. Jamison, *Recollections of Pioneer and Army Life* (Kansas City, 1911), 280; "General Sherman's Great March through the Carolinas," *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, 4/1/1865; Blake, *A Succinct History*, 81-82; Pryce, *Vanishing Footprints*, 215-26; Jones, *Reminiscences*, 103-5.

14. Blake, *A Succinct History*, 81-82.

15. Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York, 1984).



*Robert Butler's estate, The Star of Edgefield. Photo taken by author, February 14, 2017.*

not yet amassed enough human property and social prestige to be counted among the district's planter elite.<sup>16</sup> By the beginning of the Civil War, however, Robert J. Butler was a wealthy planter. In 1859 he had begun construction on a plantation house known as "The Star of Edgefield." A newspaper correspondent described the plantation as "magnificent"; elevated several hundred feet above the Savannah River, the houses and church steeples of Augusta were clearly visible from the house's windows. Such a home served a social climber like Butler as "the symbolic foundation for

---

16. Orville Vernon Burton, *In My Father's House Are Many Mansions* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1985), 40–44; John Butler Senior, 1820 census, Edgefield District, South Carolina, Ancestry.com.

his claim of membership in an upper order." The house sat on a plantation valued at \$50,000 (equivalent to \$1,470,000 in 2015). Butler's human property included 19 children under the age of 15, 8 men and 9 women between the ages of 15 and 60, and 2 men and 2 women over the age of 60. These people accounted for the majority of his personal property valued at \$32,700 (\$962,000 in 2015). Butler had become a planter in his own right in a society in which social mobility was dependent on slave ownership. His human property served not only as a source of labor on his plantation, but also as collateral for loans to expand his holdings.<sup>17</sup>

Yet the impressive plantation and enslaved people were not enough in themselves to establish Butler's claim to a high rank in the South Carolina social order; Butler also needed to assert authority over his estate and within his community in a manner required by a Southern code of honor. A South Carolina planter was expected to appear generous to those who respected his authority and retaliate violently against those who challenged him. In the fall of 1864 a dispute of honor between Butler and John David Twiggs, a Confederate officer from a prominent Augusta family, ended in an exchange of gunfire at a crossroads, leaving Twiggs dead and Butler's teenaged son fatally wounded. Butler's threat to sic his dogs on the soldiers for encroaching on his orchard was consistent with the violent defense of his honor at the crossroads and the social expectations of planter conduct.<sup>18</sup>

The Iowa soldiers perceived the hotheaded and wealthy Butler as epitomizing the brutality of the slaveholding planter class. Butler had a different reputation among the region's black pop-

---

17. Burton, *In My Father's House*, 39; "Georgia Avenue-Butler Avenue Historic District" in National Register of Historic Places Inventory, Department of the Interior, 1984, [www.nationalregister.sc.gov/aiken/S10817702017/S10817702017.pdf](http://www.nationalregister.sc.gov/aiken/S10817702017/S10817702017.pdf); Blake, *A Succinct History*, 82; Robt Butler, 1860 census, Edgefield District, South Carolina, Ancestry.com; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York, 1982); Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1982).

18. *Edgefield Advertiser*, 9/21/1864; Obituary for Robert J. Butler Jr. in *Edgefield Advertiser*, 11/16/1864. Robert J. Butler was later indicted for the murder of Colonel Twiggs and found not guilty at trial in 1866. Edgefield County Records of Mixed Provenance, 1864-1866, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, SC; Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*; Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York, 1997).

ulation. They knew him as "an old negro-hunter" who had "made his living, all he had made, by hunting negroes before the war."<sup>19</sup>

PROFESSIONAL SLAVECATCHING was seen more as an avenue for upward mobility in the antebellum South than as an activity of established planters. Successful slavecatchers took great pride in the speed with which their bloodhounds could capture runaways. The term *bloodhounds* in the colloquial usage of the antebellum North referred not to a particular breed of dog, but to any dog trained to track human fugitives. Also known as "negro dogs" in the antebellum South, bloodhounds served as a means of apprehending runaway slaves and as instruments of intimidation to deter escape attempts. After catching a runaway, dogs often hounded the runaway back to the plantation to induce fear and discourage others from similar attempts. Since enslaved people were valuable property, bloodhounds seldom killed or maimed, but they did inflict minor wounds on runaways. Such wounds demonstrated the physical reach of the slaveowner.<sup>20</sup>

In the antebellum United States, the image of the bloodhound became a symbol of the power of slaveholders as a class. In the early nineteenth-century American press, the term *bloodhound* was most associated with the war dogs used by colonial authorities to brutally conquer native populations and suppress slave rebellions in Latin America and the Caribbean. In 1840 the U.S. government imported Cuban bloodhounds as a weapon in its war against the Seminole people who were resisting removal from Florida.<sup>21</sup> Abolitionists who saw the war as a plot by proslavery politicians to expand slavery dubbed the conflict the "Bloodhound War." The Whig Party used the bloodhound controversy in campaign

---

19. *Miscellaneous Documents of the Senate of the United States for the Second Session of the Forty-Fourth Congress*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC, 1877), 152; "To and Fro on Business," *Edgefield Advertiser*, 10/30/1873; "Georgia Avenue-Butler Avenue Historic District"; Obituary for Robert J. Butler Jr.

20. John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York, 1999), 160-64.

21. I do not mean to suggest that no dogs were used to track runaway slaves before 1840, only that the importation of Cuban dogs by the federal government was an important moment in developing the image of the bloodhound in American popular culture. John Campbell, "The Seminoles, the 'Bloodhound War,' and Abolitionism, 1796-1865," *Journal of Southern History* 72 (2006), 259-302.

literature for the 1840 presidential election. Eight years later, opponents of the Whig ticket would decry Zachary Taylor, who as a general had advocated the importation of the “Cuban method” and who kept several bloodhounds at his Louisiana plantation, as “the Bloodhound candidate.”<sup>22</sup>

As the sectional conflict over slavery intensified, the image of the bloodhound appeared more frequently in Northern political rhetoric. After Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, the Wisconsin legislature stated that the law made “good citizens” into “the blood hounds . . . of the slave owner” and “the slave hunters.” In 1854 Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts admonished Edgefield’s own Senator Butler with a declaration that there was no “kennel of bloodhounds” in the Constitution.<sup>23</sup>

In the political dialogue of the 1850s—including in the Iowa press—the bloodhound became an emblem of the oppressive violence of the Southern planter. In 1859 the *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, a Republican newspaper, described the bloodhound as the “instructor and police” of the Southern plantation.<sup>24</sup> The increased use of the term *bloodhounds* in Northern political rhetoric coincided with the rapid growth of a political ideology that interpreted the power of slaveowners, embodied by bloodhounds, as a threat to the nation’s future.

Bloodhounds featured prominently in popular culture, too. In Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* they were an instrument of the power of the slaveowner. Simon Legree, the novel’s exemplar of the cruel slaveowner, owns several bloodhounds. In one scene, Legree, while “caressing the dogs with grim satisfaction,” tells Tom, “Ye see what ye’d get, if ye try to run off. These yer dogs has been raised to track niggers; and they’d jest as soon chaw one on ye up as eat their supper.” Pop-

---

22. *Ibid.*

23. “Report of the Special Committee: On that part of the Governor’s Message relating to the Fugitive Slave Law,” in *Appendix to the Journal of the Senate, 1852*, Wisconsin State Legislature (Madison, WI, 1852), 371–74; “Fast Day Address,” *Belvidere (IL) Standard*, 10/29/1861; George Frisbie Hoar, ed., *Charles Sumner: His Complete Works*, 20 vols. (Norwood, MA, 1900), 5:253

24. “Civilizing Under Difficulties,” *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, 10/15/1859. In 1855 the *Hawk-Eye* suggested that if the anti-immigrant Know Nothings won an upcoming election, the “Dutch and Irish would be hunted with bloodhounds next year.” *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, 8/8/1855.

ular antebellum productions of the novel had offstage actors imitate the howl of bloodhounds during an escape scene. The bloodhounds illustrated the reach and brutality of Legree's power.<sup>25</sup>

The growing prevalence of the bloodhound in popular culture corresponded with the growth of the free-labor movement. Free labor was defined by its opposition to the slave system of the American South and formed the ideological foundation of the Republican Party. The free-labor ethos celebrated the independent small businessman and farmer of the North; its proponents insisted that the American North's republican institutions provided every industrious man with a path to economic independence. This devotion to the progress of both the individual and the nation promoted the development of American capitalism, railroad construction, and public education.<sup>26</sup>

According to the ideology of the early Republican Party, slavery was a bulwark against progress in the American South and the enemy of free labor in the contest for the American West. In the Southern slave society, which was economically and politically dominated by a decadent and lazy planter class, there could be no dignity of labor or upward mobility for the enslaved black and poor white populations. The conflict was not simply between sections and ideologies but between two classes—Northern free laborers and Southern slaveowners—that could not coexist. Abraham Lincoln referred to this struggle as “a house divided”; William Seward described it as the “irrepressible conflict.”<sup>27</sup>

The other side of this irrepressible conflict contested the Republican claims of free-labor superiority. One of the slave system's most prominent defenders was Senator James Henry Hammond, whose plantation lay only ten miles from The Star of Edgefield. In an 1857 speech before the U.S. Senate, Hammond justified slavery by asserting that all societies required an underclass to perform menial duties so their superiors could advance humankind. He called the members of this underclass “mud-sills.”

---

25. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin, or Life among the Lowly* (Kindle edition), 392, 452; John W. Frick, *Uncle Tom's Cabin on the American Stage and Screen* (New York, 2012), 123–29.

26. Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York, 1970).

27. *Ibid.*



He claimed that the treatment of enslaved people under the paternal rule of slaveowners was more humane than Northern society's treatment of its underclass of "manual laborers and operatives."<sup>28</sup> Hammond's argument was offensive to those who believed that the free-labor system of the North created an egalitarian society of independent farmers, self-employed mechanics, and small-town merchants without a permanent underclass. The term *mudsills* entered the national political conversation as evidence of slaveholders' disdain for the Northern white free laborer.<sup>29</sup>

A year earlier, in 1856, the acts of another Edgefield politician shaped Northern public opinion toward Southerners and enshrined another term in the nation's political vocabulary. On the floor of the U.S. Senate South Carolina Congressman Preston Brooks beat Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner with a cane

28. *Ibid.*, 66–67; Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South*, 346–47.

29. Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*.

to avenge an insult Sumner had made against Brooks's cousin Senator Butler. The caning was celebrated in the South as an honorable act; in the North it was regarded as a brutal act of aggression. One Northern political cartoon depicted a raging Brooks savagely clubbing a languid Sumner, armed only with a pen. It was captioned "Southern Chivalry, Argument versus Club's."<sup>30</sup> In 1860 a glossary of American slang defined "Southern Chivalry" as "a cant term" for Southerners.<sup>31</sup> A year later, the "mud-sills" and "Southern Chivalry" were at war. Free-labor ideology served as the interpretive lens through which many Union volunteers experienced that war.

IN THE REPUBLICAN ETHOS, those who volunteered to fight in the Union Army were citizen-soldiers demonstrating "civic duty and patriotic virtue." For many, this civic duty was irrevocably tied to the free-labor interpretation of the slave system as an existential threat to the republic. They were "thinking bayonets" informed by political affairs and restrained by their own civic-mindedness from committing violence for violence's sake. They interpreted the conditions of poor Southern whites as evidence of the oppression of slaveholders and the superiority of a free-labor system.<sup>32</sup>

The men of the three Iowa regiments encamped on Shultzzer's Hill on May 22, 1865, commonly defined their service as a defense of the republic from the insidious slaveholding class. Colonel Harvey Graham, who commanded the regiments during their stay in South Carolina, identified the "Spirit of Secession" as the nemesis of "our Republican government." The threat to the republic was a threat to their own families' futures. Sergeant Taylor

---

30. Burton, *In My Father's House*, 93–95; John L. Magee, *Southern Chivalry – Argument Versus Club's*, 1856, lithograph, Library Company of Philadelphia Digital Collections, <https://digital.librarycompany.org/islandora/object/digitool%3A130221>.

31. John Russell Bartlett, *A Glossary of Words and Phrases Usually Regarded as Peculiar to the United States*, 3rd ed. (Boston, 1860).

32. Chandra Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (New York, 2007); James McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York, 1997); Joseph Allan Frank, *With Ballot and Bayonet* (Athens, GA, 1998); Mark Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy Towards Southern Civilians, 1861–1865* (New York, 1995).

Peirce of the 22nd fought to “establish a government that would protect the rights of my children.” Peirce believed that slave-owners had abandoned republican virtue to worship at the “altar of avarice” as an “incubus on our free government.” In the spring of 1863 a resolution of the 22nd Iowa that was published in local newspapers defined the regiment’s mission as defending “our Republican institutions” from a force “abhorrent to every friend of freedom throughout the world.”<sup>33</sup>

The rhetoric of the resolution was strikingly similar to the war-time platform of the Republican Party. William Milo Stone, the first colonel of the 22nd, had, as editor of a Free-Soil newspaper, played a prominent role in organizing the Iowa Republican Party. In 1863 Stone, with his arm in a sling from a wound inflicted at Vicksburg, left the army to accept the Republican nomination for governor. He won 221 votes in his former regiment to his Democratic opponent’s 36. That landslide should not be attributed solely to the regiment’s familiarity with their former commander. An overwhelming majority of Iowa soldiers supported Republican candidates. In 1864 nearly 90 percent of Iowa soldiers’ votes went to Lincoln. In the 24th Iowa that percentage was even higher, with 285 soldiers voting for Lincoln and only 18 voting for his Democratic opponent, General McClellan. In letters home, Sergeant John Walker Lee of the 22nd praised his father’s attendance at rallies for Lincoln’s National Union ticket and rejoiced at hearing that “old Johnson Co. came out all right for the Union ticket.”<sup>34</sup>

In these overwhelmingly Republican regiments, some volunteers saw little distinction between their service to the republic and their commitment to the Republican Party. When Sergeant George Remley of the 22nd was asked by his younger brother

---

33. *Iowa City Weekly Republican*, 6/28/1865; Taylor Peirce to Catherine Peirce, 1/14/1865, in *Dear Catharine, Dear Taylor*, 336; Harvey Graham to his wife, 12/14/1862, Harvey Graham Papers, SHSI-DM; Charles Haverly to “friends at home,” 9/18/1863, Charles E. Haverly Papers, SHSI-DM; *Iowa City Weekly Republican*, 5/24/1865; “The Voice of the Soldiers,” *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, 3/28/1863.

34. Addison A. Stuart, “William Milo Stone,” in *Iowa Colonels and Regiments, Being a History of Iowa Regiments in the War of Rebellion* (Des Moines, 1865), 7-15; George Remley to Pa, 12/23/1863, in *Southern Sons, Northern Soldiers*, ed. Julie Holcomb and Steven Woodworth (DeKalb, IL 2004), 112; Diary of Levi Hoag, 11/8/1864, Levi Hoag Papers, SHSI-DM; John Walker Lee to his parents, 11/20/1864, John Walker Lee Collection.

whether Union Leagues (Republican political clubs) existed in the army, he replied, "I belong to a Union League. Its members number several hundred thousand and we do not allow as much treason to be expressed in our presence as you tolerate up there in Oxford." In his last letter home before his death in battle, Remley declared that the "soldiers as a class are true as steel and will show at the coming election that they can fight for their country with ballots as valiantly as they do with bullets."<sup>35</sup>

Newspapers in the Civil War era were partisan institutions, so the allegiance of the 22nd Iowa to the *Iowa City Weekly Republican*, a Republican Party organ, provides further evidence for the political orientation of the regiment. In numerous letters home, soldiers discussed stories they had read in the *Republican*. Captain David Davis was a battlefield correspondent for the *Republican*. After Davis was killed in battle, the role passed to Sergeant Lee. In 1865 Iowa soldiers were still receiving copies of the *Republican* within a few weeks of its publication.<sup>36</sup>

Despite a common partisan allegiance, views about enslaved people varied widely within the Iowa regiments from support for the political equality of former slaves to staunch opposition to emancipation. However, across this spectrum of views toward the enslaved, there was a shared antipathy toward slaveowners. Sergeant Taylor Peirce believed black people to be "less given to vice and . . . a more intelligent class than the poor whites are and as a moral class . . . vastly superior to the higher classes," who were "raised in idleness and tyranny." Even soldiers who saw no harm in slavery could detest the arrogance of Southern slaveowners. Lieutenant Colonel John Meyer of the 28th Iowa wrote in June 1864 that if "called upon to decide if such creatures were to be free or to have a master," he would "certainly consider them in no condition to make any good use of freedom." Yet only a month later, Meyer agreed that Southern honor was what "stood in the way

---

35. Howard Remley to George Remley, 10/18/1863, in *Southern Sons, Northern Soldiers*, 97; George Remley to Howard Remley, 9/15/1864, *ibid.*, 160.

36. John Walker Lee to Father, 5/3/1865, John Walker Lee Collection. In the spring of 1864 George Remley was still reading the *Republican* so thoroughly that he wrote to his father to alert him of a notice in its pages concerning unclaimed letters at the Iowa City Post Office. George Remley to Pa, 12/23/1863, in *Southern Sons, Northern Soldiers*, 111.

of peace." Corporal Silas Hemphill wrote to his parents of his contempt for "nigger regiments" and his belief that escaped slaves were unworthy of aid provided by the army, but also condemned plantation owners for their decadence and laziness in deriving benefit from the labor of others.<sup>37</sup>

Iowa soldiers expressed contempt for wealthy planters in the political language of the free-labor ideology. After encountering the governor of Louisiana, Private Benjamin Booth described him as "one of the chivalry of the great South . . . using all the resources of his state . . . to prolong a bloody and wicked war." The Iowans described the Southern chivalry as looking down on Northern farmers as "mud sills."<sup>38</sup> From the planter's mouth, "mud-sill" was a condescension, but for the Iowa soldiers who identified themselves as "mud-sills," it was a term of pride and defiance of the planter's belief in the superiority of his class and the slave system. Ephraim Blake of the 28th and Benjamin Booth of the 22nd used the term to describe themselves and their comrades as an expression of their identity as free laborers performing their duty as citizen-soldiers. The "Southern chivalry" was the natural enemy of the mud-sill. Private Booth wrote that in fighting the war "the men of the South based their conclusions on the universally cherished belief that one son of the Southern chivalry could easily whip all the way from five to ten Northern 'mud-sills.'" In a poem for his wife, Peirce celebrated "Hawk eye brave and Hoosier stout" triumphing over "the boasting Southern chivalry."<sup>39</sup>

Wartime hatred of Confederates as arrogant adversaries of the republic was often minimized in memoirs written decades later by veterans promoting that era's reconciliatory sentiment. During the war, however, letters of soldiers expressed a hatred of their enemy exacerbated by a belief that Confederate forces operated outside the confines of civilized warfare. Stories of

---

37. John Meyer, *Diary*, 6/21/1864, 7/3/1864, 9/2/1864, John Meyer Collection, SHSI-DM; Charles Haverly to "friends at home," 9/18/1863 and undated [1863], Charles E. Haverly Papers; Silas Hemphill to Joseph Hemphill, 10/9/1863, Hemphill Family Papers, SHSI-IC; Taylor Peirce to Catherine Peirce, 5/8/1865, in *Dear Catherine, Dear Taylor*, 394.

38. Benjamin Booth, *Dark Days of Rebellion* (Garrison, IA, 1995), 30; Alfred B. Cree to Hattie Cree, 11/11/1863, A. B. Cree Letters, University of Iowa Digital Library.

39. Taylor Peirce to Catherine Peirce, 7/9/1864, in *Dear Catharine, Dear Taylor*, 223; Booth, *Dark Days of Rebellion*, 129-30.

vicious atrocities circulated in camp. In one of those stories heard by soldiers of the 22nd Iowa, Confederate partisans burned down a Unionist home with a woman and her children trapped inside. The actions of Confederate partisans from Missouri to the Shenandoah were interpreted as a product of the Southern slave society and proof of the inherent barbarity of the "Southern chivalry." The Iowa soldiers experienced some of this "uncivilized warfare" firsthand. The company descriptive book recorded Private Cyrus McKee of the 24th Iowa as "murdered by the citizens of Natchitoches, La." The circumstances of McKee's death are unclear, but the use of the word *murder* suggests that he was not killed during an engagement with uniformed enemies. Peirce described a Southern lady's letter written in Yankee blood as "evidence of the heroism of chivalry" and recalled "another one of the chivalry" drinking from a skull cup.<sup>40</sup>

BEFORE THE WAR, bloodhounds had symbolized cruel treatment of enslaved people and the political power of the "chivalry." By 1865, the bloodhound had transformed in the public imagination from a figurative oppressor of nonslaveholding whites to a literal weapon wielded against white flesh. The transformation began in 1862 with the Confederate government's employment of "negro dogs" against Southern Unionists resisting conscription. The Northern press provided sensational stories of loyal men being hunted "like wild beasts by conscripting officers with bloodhounds." These actions provided evidence of the Confederacy's contempt for nonslaveholding white men. An Iowa newspaper described the practice as "blood-hounds of rebellion" purloining "white flesh for Jefferson Davis."<sup>41</sup>

As the war continued, bloodhounds began to be used against another group of white men who resisted the authority of the

---

40. "Company Descriptive Books: Companies A-E," 24th Iowa Infantry, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, National Archives; Lycurgas Remley to Pa, 1/9/1863, in *Southern Sons, Northern Soldiers*, 29; Taylor Peirce to Catherine Peirce, 4/17/1865, in *Dear Catherine, Dear Taylor*, 384.

41. "Their Loyalty," *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, 5/31/1862; "New Use of Bloodhounds," *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, 3/21/1863; "Horrible Cruelties of the Rebels," *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, 4/2/1864; J. S. C. Abbott, "Heroic Deeds of Heroic Men," *Harper's New Monthly* 30 (February 1865) 273-81.

Confederate government: escaped prisoners of war. By the war's final months, Northerners were well aware that beasts had been employed against their young men in uniform. Not only were stories of bloodhounds published in newspapers, but bloodhounds featured prominently in many narratives of prisoners of war published during and shortly after the war.

Bloodhounds are particularly prominent in the narratives written by Union soldiers who survived imprisonment at Camp Sorghum outside Columbia, South Carolina. In lieu of a wall or a fence, Camp Sorghum had only a deadline (a line around or within a prison that a prisoner crosses at the risk of being shot). "Every morning at daylight, the hounds raced around the outside of the camp, to see if any prisoner has escaped during the night." One day, two of the dogs entered the camp itself. Samuel Byers, an officer from the 5th Iowa, and his fellow prisoners decapitated both dogs with an axe and threw their carcasses into a well. The beheading was not committed as part of an escape attempt. It was an act of vengeance against those who had used these canine instruments of intimidation to steal their agency.<sup>42</sup>

The owner of the dogs and the camp guards promised retribution for this challenge to their authority. Days later, a captive was shot in the back on the living side of the deadline. An even crueler fate befell another imprisoned officer. A Lieutenant Parker was treed by the bloodhounds after escaping the camp. The masters of the dogs forced Parker down from the tree at gunpoint. Then they sicced the animals upon him, "tearing him so fearfully" that he died of his wounds. Parker's death represented a common practice taken to an uncommon extreme. Apprehended escapees from Sorghum were often described as bearing dog bites on their bodies. One captive called Parker's brutal death "a sacrifice to Southern chivalry." He was not alone in equating the brutality of bloodhounds with the true nature of "Southern chivalry."<sup>43</sup>

---

42. S. H. M. Byers, *What I Saw in Dixie: Or Sixteen Months in Rebel Prisons* (Dansville, NY, 1868), 70-71.

43. *Ibid.*; Willard Glazier, *The Capture, Prison Pen, and the Escape, Giving an Account of Prison Life in the South* (Albany, NY, 1865), 184; J. N. Whitney, "Diary Extract," in G. E. Sabre, *Nineteen Months a Prisoner of War* (New York, 1865), 140; Allen O. Abbott, *Prison Life in the South at Richmond, Macon, Savannah, Charleston, Columbia, Charlotte, Raleigh, Goldsborough, and Andersonville* (New York, 1865), 130-31.

In his narrative of prison life published shortly after the war, Benjamin Booth of the 22nd Iowa also described the bloodhound as an instrument of repression unleashed against captured Union soldiers by the "Southern chivalry." Like Byers, Booth recalled a "large kennel of fierce blood hounds" circling his camp every morning to search for potential escapees and intimidate the inmates. A prisoner's escape was "a gala day for those who have the hounds." Once the escapee is "overtaken and once more in their power," Booth wrote, the "merriment begins, he is compelled to march back to the prison ahead of the blood hounds, and he is warned that his life depends on his own ability to keep out of the reach of the brutes." During the march, mounted men yell insults to humiliate the prisoner, comparing him to "runaway niggers." "This is called 'Southern chivalry!'" Booth concluded his account of bloodhounds in action: "Its more proper name is 'Southern barbarity and deviltry!'"<sup>44</sup>

Republican politicians seized upon this image of dogs bred as weapons to oppress enslaved people being employed to intimidate unarmed Union soldiers. Members of Congress invoked stories of bloodhounds as evidence of the true nature of slaveholders in arguing for the necessity of the Thirteenth Amendment. Congressman John Farnsworth of Illinois claimed that bloodhound pursuits of Union men proved that owning slaves makes men "ignoble, unjust, ungenerous, and tyrannical." Iowa's John Kasson described the bloodhound as an institution "subordinate to slavery" employed by the Confederacy to defend the slave order. Kasson told a story of Southerners with dogs forming a ring around four escapees from a prison camp before the "bloodhounds were let in on those four soldiers [who] were torn to pieces amid the jeers and shouts of the rabble that encircled them." Kasson argued that a defense of slavery was a defense of mutilation of white men by slavery's agents.<sup>45</sup>

Stories of the Confederacy employing bloodhounds against prisoners of war would have been known to the Iowa soldiers who visited Butler on the morning of May 22, 1865. Many of their friends and comrades had been captured during the Shenandoah

---

44. Booth, *Dark Days of Rebellion*, 129–30.

45. "Abolition of Slavery," *Woodstock (IL) Sentinel*, 2/1/1865; "Debate on Amending the Constitution," *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 1/18/1865.

Valley campaign, particularly in the chaos following the Confederate morning assault at the Battle of Cedar Creek. Not only had accounts detailing prisoner experiences been published in newspapers such as the *Iowa City Republican*, but at least one of the visitors had been a prisoner himself. In February 1864 Private William Franklin, one of the men alleged by Pryce to have participated in the killing of Butler's bloodhounds, had been captured while serving as a scout near Lavaca, Texas. He was exchanged in July 1864 and returned to his regiment in time to fight at Cedar Creek. The details of his experience in captivity are unknown, but the capture itself meant forced submission to the army of the slave system, in which bloodhounds played an integral role.<sup>46</sup>

Both the provenance and veracity of the Iowa soldiers' belief that Butler's dogs had been used against prisoners of war are unclear. It is possible that the Iowa soldiers simply assumed that every large pack of bloodhounds had been involved in pursuing prisoners of war. They also may have identified Butler's dogs with accounts of a particular pack of South Carolina bloodhounds. On January 17, 1865, in an official report, Major General John Foster, commanding a Union military district headquartered at Hilton Head on the Carolina coast, had described a Butler living about a hundred miles southeast of Hamburg who, "in November 1864, had captured more than 70 escaped Union officers by dogs."<sup>47</sup>

REGARDLESS of how their belief in Butler's culpability came to be, the Iowa soldiers' desire to act against "Southern brutality" was undoubtedly exacerbated by their location and the national political climate in May 1865. They were in South Carolina, the state most associated with secession and the slave power, at a time of intense anger against the slave system and great uncertainty about the nation's future.

On May 19, with "colors flying and drums beating" the three Iowa regiments marched through the streets of Augusta along streets lined with paroled Confederate soldiers. That night, they

---

46. "Regimental Descriptive Book," 22nd Iowa Infantry, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, National Archives.

47. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, part 3, vol. 47, Series I (Washington, DC, 1895), 75.

took special satisfaction in hammering their tent stakes into South Carolina soil. No state better represented the idea of an aristocratic slave system assaulting the nation. South Carolina had been the first state to secede and the first to fire on the flag. The state was, in the words of Lieutenant Jones of the 22nd, "the pugnacious little fire eating popinjay" and "hot bed of secession." "What a contrast," Captain Rigby wrote, to march upon "their sacred soil which was their babel four years ago, that no Yankee vandal heard should [ne'er] tread [except] as prisoners of war, while the chivalry are returning to desolated homes whipped." The politically radical Sergeant Taylor Peirce, who held the ruling class of South Carolina particularly responsible for the four years of bloodshed, wrote to his wife of a desire for revenge. "Desolation will reign where once the oligarchs of Slavery held their revels and squandered the fruits of the toils of their human brutes." He had "the will to lay waste their homes and scatter their families to the ends of the Earth for the lives they have caused to be sacrificed at the altar of Avarice and the woe and sorrow that hangs like a mist over our once happy land."<sup>48</sup>

With four years of bloodshed coming to an end, animosity toward the enemy had not dissipated but did not necessarily extend to the entire Southern population. After General Lee's surrender at Appomattox, Sergeant George Winchester of the 28th Iowa wrote that the rebels would soon "be in the bottomless pit receiving their just due from the Devil." Yet Winchester's feeling toward the Southern whites with whom he interacted daily was far more favorable. In the same letter, Winchester discussed in poetic detail his love affair with the "sweetest Southern girl."<sup>49</sup> Under a theory of the war built on a foundation of antebellum free-soil ideology, a hatred for the "rebels" was compatible with warm feelings towards many Southerners.

On April 14, 1865, Henry Ward Beecher, brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe and one of the nation's most famous orators, gave an address to celebrate the hoisting of the American flag over Fort Sumter on the fourth anniversary of its surrender to rebel

---

48. Rigby, *Diary*, 5/20/1865; Jones, *Reminiscences*, 103; Taylor Peirce to Catherine Peirce, 1/14/1865, in *Dear Catherine, Dear Taylor*, 336.

49. George W. Winchester to Wesley, 4/14/1865, Winchester Family Papers, SHSI-IC.

forces. The speech, widely published in Northern newspapers, including the *Iowa City Republican*, argued that the conflict had not been “legitimately a war between *the common people* of the North and South [but] set on by the ruling class, the aristocratic conspirators of the South.” This “ruling class” of slaveholders, “an aristocracy as intense, proud, and inflexible as ever existed,” possessing a sense of “superiority not compatible with republican equality, or with just morals,” had manipulated poor and middle-class white men into fighting a war against their own interests. Now, with the ruling class defeated and the slave system destroyed, the lower classes of Southern whites could finally reap the benefits of a free-labor society.<sup>50</sup>

Beecher did not invent this interpretation. The theory he articulated was familiar to the men of the Iowa regiments. In 1863 Private William McKeever wrote to his parents about poor white Southerners being told by planters that Northerners meant to enslave them. Benjamin Booth frequently described Southern leaders as “miserable slave-drivers” of their own men whose arrogance had led them to underestimate the strength and commitment of the “mud sills.”<sup>51</sup>

Hours after Beecher’s speech in Charleston Harbor, Abraham Lincoln was assassinated in Ford’s Theater. As word of Lincoln’s death spread to the hundreds of thousands of Union soldiers occupying the South, many soldiers wrote of their desire to avenge the crime. Some even fantasized about exterminating their now defeated enemies. Violent acts were committed against Confederate prisoners of war and Southern civilians who were deemed to be celebrating the assassination. Lincoln’s mourners viewed his assassin as a product of the inherently barbaric Southern system. Sergeant Peirce wrote that the assassination was “in keeping [with] the principles of the Southern People. Slavery has divested them of every principle of humanity. They are more like barbarians than civilized beings.” Sergeant Lee, emotionally reserved in his other letters, displayed great passion in his description of his regiment’s reaction to Lincoln’s assassination: “The rebels have

---

50. *Iowa City Weekly Republican*, 5/10/1865.

51. William McKeever to his parents, 5/4/1863, Hemphill Family Papers; “Army Correspondence,” *Ottawa (IL) Free Trader*, 9/12/1863; Booth, *Dark Days of Rebellion*, 30, 111.

caused his death and every soldier now goes in for having revenge and to . . . exterminate every traitor from the United States."<sup>52</sup>

Union soldiers interpreted both the assassination and the conditions of newly liberated prison camps as violations of the standards of civilized warfare. Their belief that the barbarity of the "Southern chivalry" was, like the war itself, a direct consequence of the slave order prescribed a course for the nation's reconstruction: a radical transformation of the South into a free-labor society. Until the South became a land of free laborers without its powerful ruling class, it could not become a loyal section of the Union. Sergeant Lee was pleased that Georgians "are a badly whipped people . . . perfectly willing [to] take the oath and abide by our laws." After leaving the army, Lee returned to the South to serve as a civilian commissary for black soldiers. Taylor Peirce proclaimed his desire to "Yankeeize" the South so the entire nation could be "blended in one vast community of free labourers." Peirce thought it necessary for Southern society to "succumb to the enterprise and superior energy of the free and labourious men of the north." Although many of his comrades disagreed, Peirce wanted a black-dominated Southern political order.<sup>53</sup>

Two days before the killing of the bloodhounds, Captain Rigby had recorded interactions with two old Southerners in his diary. The first was with a wealthy white man who told the Iowa officer, much to the chagrin of Confederate veterans around him, "'You have not whipped us, you have only overpowered us. . . . We are ready to fight you again.'" The second was with an old black man unsure whether he was free from bondage. Rigby "explained to him his freedom [and] what he might expect in the future." Encountering him again, Rigby saw that the "poor fellow's back was dreadfully lacerated by a cow hide." When the man had told his former master that he was no longer a slave, the white man had drawn his pistol and whipped him. Rigby wrote that this encounter had shown him that "we should not close our eyes to

---

52. Martha Hodes, *Mourning Lincoln* (New Haven, CT, 2015), 121–34; Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 142; Taylor Peirce to Catherine Peirce, 4/17/1865, in *Dear Catherine, Dear Taylor*, 384; John Walker Lee to his father, 4/19/1865, John Walker Lee Collection.

53. John Walker Lee to his father, 5/30/1865, John Walker Lee Collection; Taylor Peirce to Catharine Peirce, 7/16/1864, in *Dear Catherine, Dear Taylor*, 228.

the demands of humanity." If the North turned its back, Rigby feared, the old ruling class of the South would be restored to once again threaten the nation's future.<sup>54</sup>

On May 22, 1865, Butler's bloodhounds were a killable emblem of the barbarity of slaveholders as a class. The armies of the "Southern chivalry" had been defeated in the field, but the weapons that epitomized their brutality and power had not been. Butler's rumored use of his dogs against prisoners of war and his threat to sic them on Union soldiers were perceived as clear examples of the arrogant "Southern chivalry" attempting to dominate the "mud-sills" by a brutal use of force. They thus merited a violent response. By killing the bloodhounds, the Iowa soldiers intended to destroy the instruments with which Butler could violently assert his power to reverse the victory of free labor won on the battlefield.

ON JULY 4, 1865, the 22nd Iowa mustered out of federal service in Savannah, Georgia. The holiday was marked by public readings of the Declaration of Independence and the Emancipation Proclamation. That afternoon, a mob of townspeople and drunken Union soldiers assaulted the city's black fire brigade as it paraded in celebration of the nation's triumph. After the riot, Taylor Peirce wrote home to his wife about the assault. The scene led him to doubt that the South could change. He feared that the army would allow the old system to be reinstated: the old slaveholders would return to power and the former slaves would be free in name alone.<sup>55</sup>

Eleven years later, on July 4, 1876, Robert Butler's son Tom and son-in-law Henry Getsen encountered a black militia company while driving a buggy on the Hamburg road. In the decade since the war, Hamburg had become a community of the formerly enslaved. With both a gubernatorial and national election looming, tensions were high as the "Redeemer" movement of white Democrats and its paramilitary organizations sought to depose the Republican government elected by the state's black majority. Tom and Getsen demanded that the militiamen remove themselves from the path. Initially, the militia refused to yield,

---

54. Rigby, *Diary*, 5/20/1865.

55. Taylor Peirce to Catherine Peirce, 7/9/1865, in *Dear Catherine, Dear Taylor*, 416.

but after a heated exchange of words, Tom and Getsen were allowed to pass.<sup>56</sup>

Following the incident, the two young white men went to the *The Star of Edgefield* to discuss the incident with Robert Butler, who was incensed by the black militiamen's insult to his family's honor. By 1870, the value of Robert Butler's real estate had decreased from \$50,000 to \$15,000 (\$281,000 in 2015), and with the emancipation of his human property, the value of his personal property had fallen from \$32,700 to \$3,350 (\$62,800 in 2015), a tenth of its antebellum value. Two years after the war, he owned only a single dog. Clearly, he had lost much, but he had not lost his sense of honor.<sup>57</sup>

Robert Butler filed charges against the militiaman for blocking a public road and threatening Tom and Getsen. When militiamen appeared in court in Hamburg on July 8, an armed mob of white men gathered in the predominantly black community. The mob demanded that the black militia surrender its weapons. When the militiamen refused, a gun battle erupted. That night, most of the outnumbered militiamen escaped. The white mob then turned its anger on what remained of Hamburg's black population, looting homes and assaulting residents. The mob executed four black men along the banks of the Savannah River.<sup>58</sup>

The Hamburg Massacre was widely reported in Northern newspapers, knocking the Battle of Little Bighorn off the front pages in eastern cities. Yet the *Iowa City Republican* was slow to cover the Hamburg Massacre, providing only a mention in its "Condensed News" section on July 12 and a denouncement of a Democratic newspaper for defending "the inexcusable butchery of Negroes at Hamburg" on July 22. But on August 2 the *Repub-*

---

56. "Testimony of Doc Adams," in "Testimony as to the Denial of the Elective Franchise in South Carolina at the Elections of 1875 and 1876," *Miscellaneous Documents of the Senate of the United States for the Second Session of the Forty-Fourth Congress*, 1:35-37; "Testimony of Louis Schiller," *ibid.*, 1: 145-46; Claudio Saunt and Stephen Berry, "The Hamburg Massacre," *CS! Dixie* (University of Georgia), 2/12/2016, <https://csidixie.org/chronicles/hamburg-massacre>.

57. Robert J. Butler, 1870 census, Aiken County, South Carolina, Ancestry.com; Comptroller General Tax Record Books, Edgefield County, 1867, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia.

58. "Testimony of Doc Adams," 1:40-44; Saunt and Berry, "The Hamburg Massacre."

*lican* published on its front page a report of the havoc wreaked on Hamburg by the mob. Stories of similar violence would appear frequently in the months to come, but South Carolina was a particular focus. The paper published the South Carolina Democratic Party platform in its entirety. The paper's message was clear. The "Southern chivalry" sought to reverse the progress of Reconstruction and the outcome of the war itself. The *Republican* condemned Democratic presidential nominee Samuel Tilden as "the most offensive pro-slavery, anti-war, disloyal tool of the Southern rebel element."<sup>59</sup>

Many Northern Republicans viewed the election of 1876 as a continuation of the war, with the Republican Party as the successor to the Union Army and white Democrats as the successors of the Confederacy and its Northern sympathizers. The incident in Hamburg would be only one of several assaults on a black Republican community by mobs of white Southern Democrats in the months preceding the election of 1876. With a former Confederate general as their gubernatorial candidate, the Redeemers won control of South Carolina. In the Compromise of 1877, the disputed electoral votes of South Carolina and Florida were awarded to Republican Rutherford B. Hayes. The Republican administration removed federal troops from Southern states and refrained from interfering with the policy of Redeemer state government. Reconstruction was over.<sup>60</sup>

Robert J. Butler was one of many white Democrats arrested but never tried for their participation in the Hamburg Massacre.<sup>61</sup> He testified before a congressional committee investigating the violence in South Carolina that he had been ill on the day of the riot and not involved in any of the violence. However, Doc Adams,

---

59. *Iowa City Republican*, 7/12/1876, 7/16/1876, 7/22/1876, 8/2/1876, 8/17/1876, 8/18/1876, 8/20/1876, 9/29/1876; James E. Mueller, "The Old Rebel Spirit," in *Shooting Arrows and Slinging Mud: Custer, the Press, and Little Bighorn* (Norman, OK, 2013), 121-45.

60. Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 98-139; Eric Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (New York, 2006), 197-98; *Iowa City Weekly Republican*, July-September 1876.

61. In his 1896 account of his role in the killing of the bloodhounds, Ephraim Blake declared that the dogs' owner was the same Butler who "led the mob in the Hamburg massacre later on when so many colored people were murdered." Blake, *A Succinct History*, 82.

captain of the black militia company, testified to seeing "old man R. J. Butler" on the night of the massacre. Adams had watched from a hiding place as Butler shot and killed a local black man named Moses Parker.<sup>62</sup>

The conflict between the Butlers and the militiamen had not begun with the encounter on the Hamburg road. Adams and another witness testified that two months earlier, Robert's eldest son, Harrison, told them that a group of prominent local white men planned to murder Hamburg's black leaders in order to intimidate black voters. Adams testified that Harrison stated, "We have got to have just such a government as we had before the war, and when we get it all the poor men and the niggers will be disfranchised, and the rich men would rule. We can't stand it and won't stand it." Before the killing began on July 8, witnesses heard Robert Butler declare his belief in "white man's government" and rejoice in the "beginning of the redemption of South Carolina."<sup>63</sup>

On the day after the massacre, Robert Butler, Harrison, and Getsen discovered the hiding spot of Louis Schiller, a militiaman they had pursued the night before. Schiller recognized Butler as the "old negro hunter" who "wouldn't lose an opportunity to kill . . . if he could." Schiller fired at the three men with his pistol, then fled into a swamp. The men left.<sup>64</sup>

Later, Butler returned with a pack of bloodhounds to continue the hunt.

---

62. "Testimony of R. J. Butler" and "Testimony of D. L. Adams," in "Testimony as to the Denial of the Elective Franchise in South Carolina at the Elections of 1875 and 1876," *Miscellaneous Documents of the Senate of the United States for the Second Session of the Forty-Fourth Congress*, 1:1050-60, 34-77.

63. "Testimony of Doc Adams," 1:34-77; "Testimony of Harry Mays," in "Testimony as to the Denial of the Elective Franchise in South Carolina at the Elections of 1875 and 1876," *Miscellaneous Documents of the Senate of the United States for the Second Session of the Forty-Fourth Congress*, 1:27-34.

64. "Testimony of Louis Schiller," in "Testimony as to the Denial of the Elective Franchise in South Carolina at the Elections of 1875 and 1876," *Miscellaneous Documents of the Senate of the United States for the Second Session of the Forty-Fourth Congress*, 145-60.