



Negro Militia and Reconstruction

Otis A. Singletary

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Much of the violence that characterized Reconstruction was directly associated with the Negro militia movement organized by Radical politicians to support their precarious regimes in Southern states. This book is the story of that ill-fated movement, a story with important implication for later times.

Most Southern whites did not disguise their hostility toward the governments that were imposed on their states after Reconstruction entered its Radical phase. and Radical leaders lived in constant fear that this hostility would flare into open revolt. Organization of a loyal protective force was imperative if they were to remain in power.

Although planned originally as a defensive force, the Negro militia was quickly used by the Radicals for such purposes as controlling elections. The resentment of Southern whites resulting from this political activity was aggravated by crimes of violence, depredations, and minor social offenses committed by some of the militiamen. However, the white Southerner's fundamental enmity toward the Negro militia stemmed from the racial implications of a policy that armed the Negroes and placed them in positions of authority over white men.

At first, opposition to the Negro militia movement took the form of legal stratagems and other measures short of force, but the final blow to the Negro militia was dealt by white volunteer rifle companies—illegal, armed counterforces that were at the very core of the White Line movement. The race riot as a political technique was born, the most notorious riot occurring at Hamburg, South Carolina, where, the author states, the policy of “disbandment through extermination” was successfully employed. Disintegration of the entire movement was inevitable.

“It is ironic,” Singletary states, “that the organization of this protective force, because of its racial implications, actually aided in the destruction of the very thing it was created to protect.”

Before its publication, *Negro Militia and Reconstruction* won the Moncado Prize, a cash award made biennially by the American Military Institute for “the best original book-length manuscript in any field of United States Military history.”

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