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**Policing Freed People: African American Police
Officers in the Reconstruction Era Black Press**

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1. Introduction

When Galveston appointed black men to the police for the first time in 1867, a correspondent with the *New Orleans Tribune* rejoiced: “Reconstruction may now be said to have fairly begun.”¹ Thus was the importance of police forces integrating, and this development was momentous, given that some of the men patrolling Southern cities with a badge and a gun had been enslaved just a few years prior. Reconstruction also saw the founding of a black press in the South, writing for and from the African American community, shining a light onto the struggle over the meaning of freedom and how society was being restructured in response to the end of slavery. The police was one of Reconstruction’s battlegrounds, torn between the slaveocracy’s attempts to re-subjugate African Americans and the latter’s fight for their liberty and rights. Black-owned newspapers inserted themselves into this struggle, reporting on conditions in the South to, hopefully, improve them. How the black press wrote about the police and their actions elucidates how they were understood in the context of Reconstruction. This project will argue that the black press’s discourse on policing corresponded to who was in power. When Democrats controlled the police, their actions were excoriated by an adversarial press that appraised the officers as returned Confederate soldiers, “rebels.” As Republicans gained control and began appointing African Americans to the force, so too the discourse shifted and began defending the institution and its actions.

In the past years, high-profile killings of African Americans by police officers have once again demonstrated the centrality of law enforcement to the black experience in the United States and reinvigorated a discussion about the institution’s structural problems.² A part of the debate has concerned the history of policing, with a particular focus on how the police’s practices are deeply rooted in racism. How Reconstruction fits into the history of the police is unclear, yet its importance cannot be understated given that it was precisely the moment when American society and consequently the police were restructured in response to the end of slavery. On the one hand, historians have emphasized the continuities in law enforcement throughout the nineteenth century, even asking if perhaps the policing of African Americans “was just slavery under

¹ “Letter from Texas,” *New Orleans Tribune*, June 21, 1867.

² Sidney Haring argued that the “black rebellions” of the 1960s sparked increased investigation into the history of the police, and a similar process is arguably in progress in response to the Black Lives Matter movement, in particular after the violent state response in 2020. See Sidney L. Haring, *Policing a Class Society: The Experience of American Cities, 1865–1915* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 3.

a different name.”³ Clearly, this “law enforcement heritage cannot be ignored,”⁴ as Larry Spuill argues. However, Reconstruction’s defining characteristic is that it was “a moment of possibility”⁵ for African Americans, demonstrated in the fact that many large Southern cities integrated their police forces.⁶ As Kate Masur stresses, one cannot draw a “straight line from the 1860s to the present,”⁷ and perhaps the existence of black policemen suggests that, rather than continuity, Reconstruction’s developments are a rupture in the history of the police, a short moment of rapid progress that was defeated at a similar pace. The police is “the most visible and galling element”⁸ of the state; therefore, examining it is also investigating how governments exerted power over African Americans, for what purpose and to what effect. What then, if the police is understood as central to their persecution, does it mean that black men worked as police officers? And how can a reasonable genealogical thread be drawn from slave patrols to modern police forces if a period of integrated police forces exists in the midst of these two systems? For these reasons, examining the Reconstruction-era police is a particularly productive avenue of research.

The historic importance of Reconstruction has not always translated into the attention it arguably deserves, and in particular the period’s black press has scarcely been a focal point of historical research to date. However, W. E. B. Du Bois emphasized the importance of these newspapers, as for “the first time in history the people of the United States listened not only to the voices of the Negroes’ friends, but to the Negro himself. He was becoming more and more articulate.”⁹ Yet these voices have seldom been heard, particularly because the wider public discourse in America has always been controlled by whites.¹⁰ Therefore, examining the black press investigates a marginalized discourse, one sometimes able to exert influence outside of its

³ Adam Malka, *The Men of Mobtown: Policing Baltimore in the Age of Slavery and Emancipation* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 2.

⁴ Larry H. Spuill, “Slave Patrols, ‘Packs of Negro Dogs’ and Policing Black Communities,” *Phylon* 53, no. 1 (Summer 2016): 48.

⁵ Michael A Ross, *The Great New Orleans Kidnapping Case: Race, Law, and Justice in the Reconstruction Era* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 233.

⁶ For an overview of cities with African American policemen, see Dennis C. Rousey, “Black Policemen in New Orleans During Reconstruction,” *The Historian* 49, no. 1 (February 1987): 232.

⁷ Kate Masur, “Race, Policing, and Reform,” *Washington History* 32, no. 1/2 (Fall 2020): 64.

⁸ Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th Century American South* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1984), 174.

⁹ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860–1880*, 1st Free Press ed. (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1998), 230.

¹⁰ Carole Emberton, *Beyond Redemption: Race, Violence, and the American South after the Civil War* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 6–7.

direct readership, but mostly one that took place in isolation.¹¹ Nonetheless, as one of the foremost historians on the black press, Lewis Suggs, points out, “all serious scholarship about the black experience [...] is incomplete without a detailed analysis of the black press.”¹² Hence, to better understand how the black press perceived and reacted to the development of the police institution during Reconstruction, the discourse constructed within it will be analyzed.

Examining the police during Reconstruction is of interest not just because of the historic hiring of African American men as officers beginning in 1867.¹³ The era was also marked by a conflict over the meaning of freedom, in the middle of which were the police as the most visible representatives of the state, its monopoly of force and duty to protect.¹⁴ Antebellum law enforcement had been a way for white supremacist power to oppress African Americans.¹⁵ If this would now continue, and what the role of black policemen would be, are worth investigating. The black press itself understood what was at stake. The *New Orleans Tribune* emphasized how crucial it was that law enforcement respect the newly won rights of freedpeople, as, if this was not the case, the war would have been a “complete failure.”¹⁶

This project will analyze how the black press wrote about the police during both phases of Reconstruction in order to examine how the editors perceived the relationship between the institution and African Americans. First, during Presidential Reconstruction, black editors were likely to have had an adversarial attitude towards the governments controlling the police because these were run by Democrats, who represented the retrenchment of slave power. With a shift in power towards Radical Reconstruction, a shift in the discourse can also be expected, in particular because of the police’s deeply political role and the black press’s often explicit connection to the Republican Party.

This analysis of the black press’s discourse on the police is broadly divided into two parts, reflecting the distinct periods of Presidential and Radical Reconstruction. During the former, planters and the slaveocracy, represented through the Democratic Party, remained in power in

¹¹ Gwyneth Mellinger, “A Parallel Reality: The Challenges of Black Press History,” *Journalism & Communication Monographs* 22, no. 4 (December 2020): 342; Carl R. Osthaus, *Partisans of the Southern Press: Editorial Spokesmen of the Nineteenth Century* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 209.

¹² Henry Lewis Suggs, “Introduction,” in *The Black Press in the Middle West, 1865–1985*, ed. Henry Lewis Suggs, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 1–2.

¹³ Dennis C. Rousey, *Policing the Southern City: New Orleans, 1805–1889* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 119.

¹⁴ Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice*, 174; Emberton, *Beyond Redemption*, 19; Harring, *Policing a Class Society*, 7–8.

¹⁵ Sally E. Hadden, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 4–5.

¹⁶ “The Nine O’Clock Rule,” *New Orleans Tribune*, July 19, 1865.

the South and continued employing their police forces to dominate African Americans. How the black press responded to this oppression is the focus of the first half of the project, which examines the struggle over the meaning of freedom between law enforcement and African Americans. For the black press, the police were the personification of the subjugation of African Americans, and the *New Orleans Tribune* discursively involved itself in battles over the liberty of freedpeople. Nonetheless, the paper was strikingly silent in relation to everyday policing, perhaps because of the editor's class status and because the police institution was not particularly authoritative in the middle of the nineteenth century. The second half of this project analyzes the black press's discourse on African American police officers during Radical Reconstruction. Two central questions are how the newspapers made the case for the appointment of black policemen, and how the discourse changed once this lobbying was successful and biracial policing began. Closely hitched to the Republican Party in power the *Louisianian* defended the police vociferously, demonstrating the reciprocal relationship between the newspapers and governance, which reflects the interrelation of power and discourse.

The present project benefitted greatly from the digitization of the black press. To uncover the discourse on policing, archives containing newspapers from 1864–1877 were searched for articles containing pertinent words such as “police.” Most sources are from two New Orleanian papers, the *Tribune* and the *Louisianian*, which in the years of their publication closely mirror Presidential and Radical Reconstruction. The project's focus is thus on Louisiana, and New Orleans in particular; however, other smaller newspapers were also considered. On the one hand, a large number of sources was examined to determine systematicities in the discourse on policing. This involved uncovering patterns in the arguments made, concepts used, or ways of thinking displayed. On the other, particularly pertinent articles were read closely to establish the meaning of the discursive features displayed within them. Because the authorship of individual articles is no longer discernible, and given the “intensely collaborative enterprise” of newspaper creation in general, the decision was made to write of the papers as synecdochic wholes for all of their staff. Although the newspapers' multivocality is of some interest,¹⁷ in part because the

¹⁷ Benjamin Fagan, *The Black Newspaper and the Chosen Nation* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2016), 3; Eric Gardner, “Early African American Print Culture,” in *Early African American Print Culture*, eds. Lara L. Cohen and Jordan A. Stein (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 81; Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building, 1770–1870* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007), 306.

editorial staff strove to create a “chorus [...] with a distinct personality that transcended the individual ideas of its editor,”¹⁸ they will be understood as single historical actors.

This project will use “African American” and “black” quasi interchangeably, principally for variance in terminology,¹⁹ while “freedmen” or “freedpeople” is used to refer to those who had been enslaved as distinct from those free before the war, including Afro-Creoles. Historical terms, whether purposefully degrading or deemed offensive in a contemporary context, are used only when quoting primary sources.²⁰ This project will not capitalize “black,” as the implied political self-description perhaps does not fully apply to the historical actors and the logic would also suggest that “white” might need to be capitalized as well, reifying the distinction.²¹

The next chapter will explain how Foucauldian discourse theory is employed in this project, emphasizing that, rather than a strictly methodological approach, it is understood as a theoretical stance. To uncover the black press’s discourse on policing, systematicities will be examined, while also closely reading the sources to untangle the concealed rules governing statements on the police, paying close attention to where the horizon of the sayable, or perhaps even thinkable, is located. Chapter Three explains why the black press was chosen as the subject of historical research and why, despite its limitations, it is a productive field of study. Afterward, the context of mid-nineteenth-century policing is sketched out in Chapter Four to historicize the institution and make readers aware of the substantial differences to contemporary law enforcement. The project’s analysis begins with Chapter Five, which examines the black press’s discourse on policing during Presidential Reconstruction, before black policemen were hired and while Democrat-ruled Southern governments attempted to maintain the subjugation of African Americans. The *New Orleans Tribune* is the particular focus of this chapter, as it clashed with the municipal government over the meaning of freedom in the face of police harassment of freedpeople, culminating in the 1866 massacre at the Mechanics’ Institute. Chapter Six illustrates the black press’s response to the appointment of African Americans to the police and how, given the change in power that led to Radical Reconstruction, the discourse markedly shifted. Especially P. B. S. Pinchback’s *Louisianian* is of interest, as it was not just a black-owned newspaper but also one supporting the Republican Party while it ruled the Bayou State.

¹⁸ Fagan, *Chosen Nation*, 3.

¹⁹ Christine Knauer, *Let Us Fight as Free Men: Black Soldiers and Civil Rights*, 1st ed. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 11.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), xxiii.

2. Foucauldian Discourse Analysis as a Theoretical Stance

In the Foucauldian sense, discourse can be understood as “groups of utterances which seem to be regulated in some way and which seem to have a coherence and a force to them in common.”²² Discourse has been called a “notoriously slippery concept,”²³ thus necessitating an explanation of how it will be understood in this project. Rather than interpreting discourse analysis as a methodical approach in a strict sense, it will be regarded as a theoretical stance,²⁴ in particular because Michel Foucault himself emphasized that his works could be understood as “little tool boxes.”²⁵

A discourse on policing in the black press can be detected by identifying “systematicity”²⁶ in the arguments made, concepts used, or ways of thinking displayed on the newspaper pages. Therefore, a corpus of pertinent articles on the topic was collated, which was examined for regularities. Because the production of discourses is shaped by power relations,²⁷ this examination also reveals the black press’s position in society, particularly vis-à-vis white supremacist dominance and in their relationship to the Republican Party. As discourse is “the object and site of struggle,”²⁸ analyzing the discourse on police also entails interpreting the battles over police brutality during Presidential Reconstruction and then over interracial policing during Radical Reconstruction. Furthermore, examining the black press’s discourse is important insofar as it discloses how the authors and editors “constructed shared consciousness, making interpretable and sometimes confronting the systems of social organization in which their lives are rooted.”²⁹ An important caveat, however, is that this discourse had perhaps only a very narrow influence, situated in its own history and bound to the particular medium of the black newspaper.³⁰ Nonetheless, as Marc Steinberg explains, “discursive analysis illuminates how groups collectively challenge and transform the symbolic structures of social life in order to change their material circumstances.”³¹

²² Sara Mills, *Discourse*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), 6.

²³ Michael Bennett, *Democratic Discourses: The Radical Abolition Movement and Antebellum American Literature* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 4.

²⁴ Philipp Sarasin, *Geschichtswissenschaft und Diskursanalyse*, 1st ed. (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2003), 8.

²⁵ Cited in Mills, *Discourse*, 15.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ See, for example, *ibid.*, 8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁹ Marc W. Steinberg, *Fighting Words: Working-Class Formation, Collective Action, and Discourse in Early Nineteenth-Century England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 2.

³⁰ On the materially constrained scope of discursively created epistemic objects, see Sarasin, *Geschichtswissenschaft und Diskursanalyse*, 37.

³¹ Steinberg, *Fighting Words*, 2.

One motivation for choosing Foucauldian discourse analysis is his hostility “to any notion of progress,” thus emphasizing “rupture and disjunction in historical processes.”³² Fundamentally, Reconstruction can be viewed as a fracture in the United States’ narrative of progress. After all, African Americans were only briefly hired as policemen in large numbers in the middle of the nineteenth century, before waiting nearly a century to be widely represented in law enforcement again. Therefore, the discourse on policing in this period is also likely to be discontinuous, making Foucault’s approach stressing disjunction particularly suitable.

A lot of the information surrounding the Reconstruction-era black press is destroyed, lost, or not accessible.³³ Therefore, discourse analysis appears to be a particularly suitable approach, as it is a way to examine the sources as they appear by themselves, somewhat removing questions concerning authors or the context in which the sources were created. Foucault’s theories are useful, because although authorial intent is not meaningless for him, it is also not central. For example, he argues that that an author’s statements can be related to another text, even if the author was not aware of the other text.³⁴ The identities of the authors of most articles in the black press are irretrievably lost. However, discourse analysis overcomes this limitation, as it recognizes the newspaper’s creation as a sum greater than the individual parts. Benjamin Fagan notes that editors “collected and arranged the particular voice and viewpoints of the contributors” to their papers to create “a chorus [...] with a distinct personality that transcended the individual ideas of its editor.”³⁵ Examining the discourse accentuates this chorus. However, discourse analysis is not a panacea to the problem of missing context. As Foucault himself argues, discursive relations are not “internal to [the] discourse itself.”³⁶ Context matters and “a discourse is not a disembodied collection of statements” but created within a social structure and determined by this.³⁷ Yet, because discourse analysis emphasizes the texts themselves and their meaning in the aggregate, beginning from noticeable patterns rather than the context that may have created them, it was chosen as the methodological access to this project.³⁸

³² Simon Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 2006), 90.

³³ Frances Smith Foster, “A Narrative of the Interesting Origins and (Somewhat) Surprising Developments of African-American Print Culture,” *American Literary History* 17, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 714.

³⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2010), 29.

³⁵ Fagan, *Chosen Nation*, 3.

³⁶ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 46.

³⁷ Mills, *Discourse*, 10.

³⁸ Achim Landwehr, *Historische Diskursanalyse*, 2nd updated ed. (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2018), 103.

On a basic level, the aim of discourse analysis is to uncover the rules governing a group of statements.³⁹ This includes how things are said, for example what words or phrases are used. The historian's task is to uncover regularities, as discourse is formed by a systematic organization of statements and through a homogeneous (but not identical) repetition.⁴⁰ From this theoretical standpoint, the scope of primary sources thus had to be chosen such that there were enough examples to notice a regularity. Therefore, rather than closely examining a few particular sources, a broad range was read. At the point where sources became predictable, a discursive strand was thus uncovered.

The black press, as a print culture created by and for an oppressed people,⁴¹ was meaningfully constrained by external forces such as threats of violence or financial difficulties.⁴² Thus, what was not written about can be equally informative as the articles themselves. Historian of the black press Eric Gardner argues for seeing "'coherence' and 'connection' in the midst of gaps—perhaps sometimes because of the gaps."⁴³ As discourses can be understood as "principally organized around practices of exclusion,"⁴⁴ analyzing the "gaps, voids, absences, limits, [and] division"⁴⁵ helps uncover how and why the African American editors were restricted in what they could write concerning the police. Although Foucault argues that discourse analysis is not about "linking these 'exclusions' to a repression,"⁴⁶ the history of African Americans in the nineteenth century precludes ignoring these forces. However, looking at the gaps is not just about uncovering what statements or arguments were unsayable due to restrictive power structures, but also about determining if perhaps the limits in the discourse correspond to the horizon of the black press's mental world. Maybe what was not said was "simply unimaginable"⁴⁷ for authors and editors.⁴⁸ Determining the difference between unsayable and unthinkable is challenging. However, by closely examining what statements are made and contextualizing these, a distinction between the two can be ventured. For example, the newspapers were silent about

³⁹ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 90.

⁴¹ Eric Gardner, *Black Print Unbound: The Christian Recorder, African American Literature, and Periodical Culture* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 14.

⁴² See chap. 3, 14.

⁴³ Gardner, *Black Print Unbound*, 14.

⁴⁴ Mills, *Discourse*, 11.

⁴⁵ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 119.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 199.

⁴⁷ Timothy Shortell, "The Rhetoric of Black Abolitionism: An Exploratory Analysis of Antislavery Newspapers in New York State," *Social Science History* 28, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 104.

⁴⁸ Jürgen Martschukat, "Geschichte Schreiben mit Foucault – Eine Einleitung," in *Geschichte Schreiben mit Foucault*, ed. Jürgen Martschukat (Frankfurt: Campus, 2002), 10.

women serving as police officers precisely when it seems obvious to a contemporary reader that women could have served in this position, suggesting that female officers were an unthinkable proposition.⁴⁹ Paying close attention to specifically these types of silences, and possible reasons for their presence, is also a way to evaluate how it came to be that “what it is possible to say seems self-evident and natural”; Sara Mills argues that “this naturalness is a result of what has been excluded, that which is almost unsayable.”⁵⁰ Finding the black press’s discursive horizon on policing is therefore also determining the foundations, and limitations, of their knowledge.⁵¹

Examining discursive gaps also points towards a crucial aspect of Foucault’s theories on discourse, because they were not just theories on statements but fundamentally about power and how it “was exercised, its practices, strategies and technologies at micro-level.”⁵² Discourse and power are doubly entangled, creating each other.⁵³ On the one hand, discourses are “groupings of statements produced within power relations”⁵⁴; thus, examining how the black press wrote about policing also reveals the architecture of power the authors were writing within. On the other hand, Foucault stresses that discourses create power by shaping what is understood to be the truth,⁵⁵ or, at least when successful, they could affect power.⁵⁶ The marginalization of the black press suggests that they did not create a hegemonically accepted truth. Nonetheless, the press was not entirely powerless and can thus be understood as having created *a* truth. This relative truth will be examined for its relationship to power, both internally in the black community and externally in wider American society, in particular to the Republican Party.

Importantly, Foucault “is not interested in which discourse is a true or accurate representation of the ‘real.’”⁵⁷ As he succinctly argues, rather than trying to uncover what the sources are “really saying,” discourse analysis asks “what it means to them to have come into existence [...] when and where they did.”⁵⁸ Therefore, this project will not be using the black press to establish the reality of policing during Reconstruction, simply because it is presupposed that there is no way to get beyond the discourse and to access reality by itself.⁵⁹ Furthermore, as

⁴⁹ See chap. 5, 38-39.

⁵⁰ Mills, *Discourse*, 11.

⁵¹ See, Landwehr, *Historische Diskursanalyse*, 125.

⁵² Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory*, 92.

⁵³ Landwehr calls this *Erkenntnisgrundlagen*. See, Landwehr, *Historische Diskursanalyse*, 71, 102.

⁵⁴ Mills, *Discourse*, 8.

⁵⁵ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 109.

⁵⁶ Achim Landwehr, “Diskurs und Diskursgeschichte,” *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, November 2, 2010.

⁵⁷ Mills, *Discourse*, 17.

⁵⁸ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 109.

⁵⁹ See, Landwehr, “Diskurs und Diskursgeschichte.”

Mills explains, because “discourses [...] do not occur in isolation but in dialogue, in relation to or, more often, in contrast and opposition to other groups of utterances,”⁶⁰ this project attempts to determine where the black press adopts hegemonic positions and where it created its own. Situating the black press’s discourse in the wider historical context is one of this project’s approaches to better understanding the newspapers’ position during Reconstruction.

A caveat to using discourse analysis lies in Reconstruction’s turmoil, as trying to uncover *the* discourse presupposes a degree of consistency which possibly did not exist. Rather than assuming the existence of a singular discourse on policing, discourse itself will be understood as a “collective construction” containing “contradictions and unresolved tensions.”⁶¹ Finding the areas of disagreement or inconsistency may indeed be a most interesting aspect, because, as historian Michael Bennett elucidates, there is “radical potential latent in these ambivalences.”⁶² Moreover, the black press’s discourse will be considered diachronically, as being the “site of constant contestation of meaning”⁶³ over time. Thus, rather than uncovering something that could be called *the* discourse on policing during the Reconstruction era, one particular discursive thread, located in the statements of a particular sub-group, will be unveiled.⁶⁴

Like its editors and audience, the black press was marginalized. But how did this relative powerlessness translate into the discourse on policing, an institution intricately linked to the exercise of power? As Achim Landwehr explains, outside of hegemonic discourse it is barely possible to make one’s voice heard.⁶⁵ This project aims precisely to listen to those who were rarely heard. But it should not be presupposed that a marginalized role in society translated directly into the authors of the black press adopting a counter-hegemonic discourse. In fact, it will be shown that the black press more often wrote in accordance with mainstream ideologies, and that its close relationship with the Republican Party meant it rarely strayed from their influence. Nonetheless, it is important to stress that a discursive formation has a “relative autonomy” in that, although it is “tied to specific conditions of possibility [...] it is never reducible to the mere expression of those conditions.”⁶⁶ Therefore, unexpected contingencies may also influence the black press’s discourse in ways that are difficult to uncover for contemporary readers.

⁶⁰ Mills, *Discourse*, 10.

⁶¹ Shortell, “The Rhetoric of Black Abolitionism: An Exploratory Analysis of Antislavery Newspapers in New York State,” 77.

⁶² Bennett, *Democratic Discourses*, 4–5.

⁶³ Mills, *Discourse*, 14.

⁶⁴ Cf. Landwehr, *Historische Diskursanalyse*, 98.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁶⁶ Paul Miller, “Toward a Post-Foucauldian History of Discursive Practices,” *Configurations* 7, no. 2 (1999): 214.

3. “Too long have others spoken for us”⁶⁷: The Black Press as the Subject of Historical Research

Frederick Douglass, in his antebellum newspaper *Freedom's Journal*, explained his motivation: “We wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us.”⁶⁸ To hear the black community’s own voice on the issue of law enforcement is precisely why the black press was chosen as the object of analysis. This rationale presupposes a meaningful difference in how the white and the black presses approached the issue of policing, which is supported by the claims that the black press “functioned in a parallel reality”⁶⁹ and wrote what the white press would not.⁷⁰ However, it is not indisputable that racial difference in the staffing of newspapers necessarily translated into divergent opinions on the police.

Categorizing newspapers as belonging to the black press is not straightforward and has been debated for decades.⁷¹ Some papers assist the historian by using self-characterizing titles such as the *Colored Tennessean* or the *Anglo-African*. Most cases, however, are more difficult. Thomas Davis differentiates between papers being classified by “historical criteria,” which he defines as the identification of publishers and editors as black, and “secondary criteria [which] have included measure of the paper’s content of black causes and self-identification with black interests.”⁷² Yet both methods of grouping are not without fault. First, focusing on the staff’s (self-) identification as black, as several historians have done,⁷³ is complicated by cases such as the *Mobile Nationalist*, which is considered part of the black press due to an African American board of directors and despite having two white Northerners as its editors.⁷⁴ Although looking at the historical criteria is a starting point, relying only on these has been rightfully criticized.⁷⁵ Secondary criteria are less suitable, beginning with the fact that many editors “rejected the label

⁶⁷ “To our Patrons,” *Freedom's Journal*, March 16, 1827.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Mellinger, “A Parallel Reality,” 342.

⁷⁰ Henry Lewis Suggs, “Introduction,” in *The Black Press in the South, 1865–1979*, ed. Henry Lewis Suggs, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), xi.

⁷¹ Henry Lewis Suggs, “Conclusion,” in *The Black Press in the South, 1865–1979*, ed. Henry Lewis Suggs, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), 427.

⁷² Thomas J. Davis, “Louisiana,” in *The Black Press in the South, 1865–1979*, ed. Henry Lewis Suggs, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), 162.

⁷³ Penelope L. Bullock, *The Afro-American Periodical Press, 1838–1909* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 1–2; Suggs, “Introduction,” 1983, vii.

⁷⁴ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877*, 1st Perennial Classics ed. (New York, NY: Perennial Classics, 2002), 117.

⁷⁵ See Foster, “A Narrative of the Interesting Origins and (Somewhat) Surprising Developments of African-American Print Culture,” 734.

‘black,’ because they believed that their programs benefited the entire community”⁷⁶ and would thus not consider themselves identified exclusively with black interests. Furthermore, many newspapers operated by African Americans during Reconstruction were closely intertwined with the Republican Party, such that they have been examined as a subset of the party press rather than the ethnic press.⁷⁷ P. B. S. Pinchback’s *Louisianian* made the paper’s outlook unmistakable, prominently displaying its motto, “Republican at all times, and under all circumstances,” on the front page.⁷⁸ Perhaps because of this partisan focus, James Danky and Maureen Hady opted not to include Pinchback’s paper in their comprehensive bibliography of African American newspapers.⁷⁹ This project, however, will examine the *Louisianian* precisely with a view to determining how the intertwined roles of the Republican Party and African Americans influenced the discourse on policing.

This project privileges historical criteria above secondary ones, but, as Martin Dann acknowledges, this approach is semi-arbitrary and less a question of definition than an effort to “maintain consistency.”⁸⁰ To a large extent, this project relies on the classification already undertaken by the two archives consulted, the Readex “African American Newspapers” collection and the Library of Congress’s “Chronicling America” collection. However, neither organization explains its criteria for inclusion. The Readex archive’s definition appears to be excessively broad, as they have also entered the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* into their collection although no significant staff with African descent could be determined. Perhaps the motivation to include it came from the paper’s outlook, as it concerned itself with the situation of African Americans. However, accepting secondary criteria as definitional would mean including papers that do not privilege the voice of African Americans. Thus, the *Standard* was excluded, as it is an example where others plead the cause.

One of the *Louisianian*’s editors, William G. Brown, struck at “the black label as restrictive rather than descriptive.”⁸¹ Moreover, the Reconstruction era’s pioneering papers in the South did not self-identify as belonging to a separate black press.⁸² Thus, the categorization in this

⁷⁶ Suggs, “Introduction,” 1983, vii; see also Davis, “Louisiana,” 162.

⁷⁷ See Richard H. Abbott, *For Free Press and Equal Rights: Republican Newspapers in the Reconstruction South*, ed. John W. Quist (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2004).

⁷⁸ See for example the first issue of the *Louisianian* under Pinchback’s aegis, December 18, 1870.

⁷⁹ See James Philip Danky and Maureen E. Hady, eds., *African-American Newspapers and Periodicals: A National Bibliography*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

⁸⁰ Martin E. Dann, *The Black Press, 1827–1890: The Quest for National Identity* (New York, NY: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1971), 7.

⁸¹ Davis, “Louisiana,” 161.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 162.

project is adopted as a means by which to better to find the points of difference and convergence between papers owned and operated by African Americans and those owned by whites, but not meant as a restrictive typecast. The black press only arose as a distinct entity due to white Americans' insistence on structuring the social system around race and thus creating "a distinct and separate bloc of its black citizens through patterns of discrimination, separation, and exclusion."⁸³ This project will endeavor not to reify this system but to determine how its manifestations appeared in newspapers operated by those actively discriminated against.

Newspapers are a worthwhile object of historical analysis as they contain information pointing to the "mental world" of a period,⁸⁴ particularly because of news culture's foregrounding of "ephemerality, collective anonymous production, and the collision of the reader's mind with the exterior world."⁸⁵ Although black press papers were often designed to speak to and for the community,⁸⁶ it should not be forgotten that their creators were mostly from an elite subsection⁸⁷ which "stood somewhere between the white former ruling class and the black peasantry, but they were undoubtedly much closer to the latter."⁸⁸ Therefore, rather than extrapolating wider conclusions about African Americans in general from the narrow black press sources, this project emphasizes that the discourse was constructed by a black elite, which had considerable influence but was not representative. Thus, as is the case with W. Marvin Dulaney's work *Black Police in America*, one of the first comprehensive examinations of the history of interracial policing, there is the danger that "little attention [is] paid to the voices of the policed" in this project as well.⁸⁹ Nonetheless, because newspapers were "the only medium in America by which the black leadership [could] send an unedited message to the masses,"⁹⁰ the sources analyzed are of inestimable value.

⁸³ Suggs, "Conclusion," 430.

⁸⁴ Gilles Vandal, *Rethinking Southern Violence: Homicides in Post-Civil War Louisiana, 1866–1884* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2000), x.

⁸⁵ John Nerone, "Newspapers and the Public Sphere," in *The Industrial Book, 1840–1880*, ed. David D. Hall, vol. 3 (Chapel Hill, NC: Published by the University of North Carolina Press in association with the American Antiquarian Society, 2007), 230–31.

⁸⁶ Kathleen Ann Clark, *Defining Moments: African American Commemoration & Political Culture in the South, 1863–1913* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 4.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Edmund L. Drago, *Black Politicians and Reconstruction in Georgia: A Splendid Failure* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 37.

⁸⁹ Peter Shulman, "Review of: Black Police in America," *Social Science Quarterly* 4, no. 78 (1997): 1027.

⁹⁰ Henry Lewis Suggs, "Conclusion: An Interpretive History of the Black Press in the Middle West, 1865–1985," in *The Black Press in the Middle West, 1865–1985*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 355.

Most black southerners had been barred from literacy before the war⁹¹ and literacy remained low throughout Reconstruction.⁹² Coupled with freedpeople's poverty and white businesses eschewing advertising, this meant the black press was consistently plagued by financial difficulties.⁹³ However, freedpeople "avidly sought to join the literate nation"⁹⁴ and thus overcame the challenges of illiteracy and poverty by communal reading wherever "a group could be assembled."⁹⁵ The black press reached an audience far larger than its subscription rolls,⁹⁶ "spanning the illiterate, semiliterate, and the literate."⁹⁷ Consequently, examining its discourse is worthwhile, as the periodicals are likely to have reached and influenced a wide readership.

To date, interest in the black press has been intermittent at best, particularly for the Reconstruction era as compared to antebellum papers.⁹⁸ The black press has either been treated as a subsection of other categorizations, such as the Republican press or the Southern press,⁹⁹ or been covered in extensive volumes with a dearth of analysis due to their wide scope.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps the challenges of examining the black press are amongst the reasons why the topic has been understudied, although racist beliefs about black inferiority certainly will have also played a role in the past.¹⁰¹ It is still true that bibliographies and indexes of the black press are scarce and irregular, complicating research.¹⁰² Furthermore, there is a significant lack of access to most

⁹¹ Barbara Sicherman, "Ideologies and Practices of Reading," in *The Industrial Book, 1840–1880*, ed. David D. Hall, vol. 3, (Chapel Hill, NC: Published by the University of North Carolina Press in association with the American Antiquarian Society, 2007), 279.

⁹² By 1880, African American literacy had only reached approximately 30%. See *ibid.*, 281.

⁹³ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 117; Osthaus, *Partisans of the Southern Press*, 209.

⁹⁴ David D. Hall, *The Industrial Book, 1840–1880*, vol. 3 (Chapel Hill, NC: Published by the University of North Carolina Press in association with the American Antiquarian Society, 2007), 347.

⁹⁵ Abbott, *For Free Press and Equal Rights*, 54. See also Dann, *The Black Press*, 7; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 117; Foster, "A Narrative of the Interesting Origins and (Somewhat) Surprising Developments of African-American Print Culture," 727.

⁹⁶ Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South, from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 184.

⁹⁷ Jeannine Marie DeLombard, "African American Cultures of Print," in *The Industrial Book, 1840–1880*, ed. David D. Hall, vol. 3 (Chapel Hill, NC: Published by the University of North Carolina Press in association with the American Antiquarian Society, 2007), 362.

⁹⁸ Penelope Bullock's work is symptomatic of the issue, as she simply passes over the period in its entirety, claiming that no black periodicals were published because of the era's optimism: "[t]hus the periodical, as an agent for the vindication of equal rights, was no longer needed," a claim that does not seem convincing. See Bullock, *The Afro-American Periodical Press*, 64.

⁹⁹ See Abbott, *For Free Press and Equal Rights*; Osthaus, *Partisans of the Southern Press*.

¹⁰⁰ See Armistead S. Pride and Clint C. Wilson II, *A History of the Black Press* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1997); Henry Lewis Suggs, ed., *The Black Press in the Middle West, 1865–1985*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996); Henry Lewis Suggs, ed., *The Black Press in the South, 1865–1979*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983).

¹⁰¹ Henry Lewis Suggs, "Bibliographical Essay," in *The Black Press in the South, 1865–1979*, ed. Henry Lewis Suggs, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), 431.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

black-run newspapers, in particular the older they are or the more rural their distribution was. As Foster bemoans, “so much has already been lost, gone astray, or been stolen that complete restoration is impossible.”¹⁰³ Nonetheless, the numerous works on the antebellum black press suggest that these challenges can be overcome.¹⁰⁴

The digitization and online accessibility of the black press in archives such as those of the Library of Congress or Readex is a pivotal development enabling detailed research. In order to determine the discourse on policing, it was crucial to access a large number of articles from the Reconstruction era. Thus, the archives were searched for articles containing the word “police” or alternative equivalents. Pertinent sources were collated to create a corpus that could be analyzed for themes, patterns, rhetorical strategies, and silence, thus exposing the discourse. That the archives enable text-based searching of decades of black newspapers is an invaluable tool without which this project would not have been feasible. Because the police were not one of the Reconstruction era’s major battlegrounds, pertinent articles are intermittent and spread out, making manually finding them onerous if not wholly impractical. Nonetheless, the digital search is not ideal, as there were numerous false positives,¹⁰⁵ indicating that the program might have also missed articles when the key terms were illegible. However, the large number of results suggests that the omissions were not significant and not larger than the margin of error when manually skimming the newspapers. The most meaningful drawback of digitally searching only for relevant articles is that it sacrifices context in favor of quantity. As Gardner warns, in digitized form we lose appreciation of the newspapers’ “status as circulating physical objects,”¹⁰⁶ particularly as articles can be read as isolated snippets rather than part of a broader page or in relation to other reports. To somewhat counterbalance this problem, articles with peripheral topics, such as on soldiers and voting, were also read, although not as systematically. Nevertheless, quantity took precedence over context, as it allows for a broad impression of the discourse on policing to be discerned.

¹⁰³ Foster, “A Narrative of the Interesting Origins and (Somewhat) Surprising Developments of African-American Print Culture,” 714.

¹⁰⁴ See Jeannine Marie DeLombard, *Slavery on Trial: Law, Abolitionism, and Print Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); John Ernest, *Liberation Historiography: African American Writers and the Challenge of History, 1794–1861* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Fagan, *Chosen Nation*; Gardner, *Black Print Unbound*; Frankie Hutton, *The Early Black Press in America, 1827 to 1860*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993).

¹⁰⁵ For example, “notice” was misread as “police” in numerous instances.

¹⁰⁶ Eric Gardner, “Accessing Early Black Print,” *Legacy* 33, no. 1 (2016): 27.

Overall, searching both archives returned approximately four thousand results, of which only around five hundred were included in the examined corpus. For example, nearly half of the *New Orleans Tribune*'s French results, and other secondary usages such as in "police juries"¹⁰⁷ were excluded. Additionally, many newspapers were commissioned to print official documents such as legislative sessions, committee reports, or general orders. Although these documents also belong to the wider discourse on policing, and are found on the pages of the black press, they were not included in the corpus, as newspaper editors did not have any influence over the content of what was being printed and these texts thus do not necessarily reflect how the black press wrote and thought about policing. In total, seventeen different African American papers from ten states and the District of Columbia were included in the corpus. However, the majority of sources come from two papers, the *New Orleans Tribune* and *Louisianian*.¹⁰⁸ Other newspapers' short-lived runs often meant that there are only a few instances when they wrote about the police. While this project thus centers on New Orleans, including other papers enabled a cross-national comparison with interesting indications of the similarities and differences in the black press's discourse on policing.

The search for pertinent articles was focused on a narrow sense of "police," referring to mostly urban law enforcement. "Officer" was not searched for because the military usage of the word overshadowed alternative usages, returning too many extraneous sources. Although it is documented that there had been several African American sheriffs, there are surprisingly few sources concerning them in the black press.¹⁰⁹ This is perhaps because they were a rural phenomenon, and the newspapers were urban in outlook. Furthermore, due to the breadth of the sheriff's profession—from law enforcement to census taker—examining them would go beyond this project's scope. Nonetheless, this is a significant lacuna, particularly because of sheriffs' dominant role in rural politics,¹¹⁰ and Eric Foner's lament that "we know virtually nothing about" black sheriffs remains true.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Police juries are the Louisianan equivalent to county commissions or councils.

¹⁰⁸ The *Louisianian* was published in three different formats, as *Semi-Weekly*, *Weekly*, and simply *Louisianian*. All three papers were identical in staff and editorial tone, differing only in which articles were included or excluded. Thus, the three papers are not differentiated but all called the *Louisianian* in this work.

¹⁰⁹ "Election Results," *Weekly Louisianian*, November 19, 1871; "Election Results," *Weekly Louisianian*, November 26, 1871; Robert E. Moran, "Local Black Elected Officials in Ascension Parish (1868–1878)," *Louisiana History* 27, no. 3 (Summer 1986): 280; Eric Foner, "Reconstruction Revisited," *Reviews in American History*, The Promise of American History: Progress and Prospects, 10, no. 4 (December 1982): 89.

¹¹⁰ Toby Moore, "Race and the County Sheriff in the American South," *International Social Science Review* 72, no. 1/2 (1997): 50.

¹¹¹ Foner, "Reconstruction Revisited," 89.

A compelling starting point for this project is the inception of the English-language black press in the South with the publication of the *New Orleans Tribune*'s first issue, on July 21, 1864.¹¹² Although another African American owned paper, *L'Union*, had started two years prior to the *Tribune*, this paper will not be examined as it was published in French,¹¹³ not allowing for a productive comparison with the rest of the black press. Conventionally, the Reconstruction era is considered to have ended with the compromise of 1877 and the subsequent removal of federal troops from the South, as this also brought about the reversal of many advances African Americans had achieved.¹¹⁴ Recently, however, historians have argued for lengthening the period to at least the early 1880s, as Reconstruction's achievements were not abruptly reversed but gradually erased.¹¹⁵ Nonetheless, 1877 will be the approximate end-point of this project, as extending the analysis into the next decade raises several difficulties. From the 1860s to the 1880s, newspapers underwent considerable professionalization,¹¹⁶ which is noticeable even from the page layout and design. More importantly, the black press shifted its outlook considerably in response to Redemption. As Osthaus comments, the end of Reconstruction led to a decline in political power and subsequent loss of hope. Furthermore, "[a]ngry, militant, political journalism was increasingly rare. It was simply too risky."¹¹⁷ Interesting in their own right, these reasons for including post-Reconstruction papers in this project would exceed the scope.

Examining the black press is about listening to those who have been little heard since Reconstruction but who played a major part in the period's development. But it is also a matter of justice, because those who created the black press in the South often did so "[a]t great personal peril and with dauntless courage," as Du Bois stressed.¹¹⁸ The newspapermen braved these dangers in order to record their history in their own words, and, if they believed this cause to be worth the risk, then what they wrote is worthy of a reexamination.

¹¹² Davis, "Louisiana," 155.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹¹⁴ See, for example, Foner's seminal work on Reconstruction: Foner, *Reconstruction*, 575–87.

¹¹⁵ Justin Nystrom argues that, rather than focusing on federal policy, historians should "emphasize the enduring legacies of the war and the postbellum struggle." See Justin A. Nystrom, *New Orleans after the Civil War: Race, Politics, and a New Birth of Freedom* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 4. Thomas Brown also discusses this "problem of periodization," and several contributions in his edited volume go beyond the traditional end-date of 1877. See Thomas J. Brown, *Reconstructions: New Perspectives on the Postbellum United States* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008). For the relevance of African American policemen to the debate on long Reconstruction see chap. 7, 63–65.

¹¹⁶ Mark W. Summers, *The Press Gang: Newspapers and Politics, 1865–1878* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 315.

¹¹⁷ Osthaus, *Partisans of the Southern Press*, 208.

¹¹⁸ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, 456.

4. Historicizing the Reconstruction-Era Police

To examine the black press's discourse on the police, the institution's nineteenth-century distinctiveness first needs to be contextualized, as it has changed to such an extent that it would likely be unrecognizable today.¹¹⁹ In particular, law enforcement agencies during Reconstruction were far less professionalized or systematized and far more involved with partisan politics than the contemporary police. Policing was often amateurish, with practically no entry requirements, little training, and few regulations.¹²⁰ Many forces eschewed uniforms or rank,¹²¹ and if officers were armed at all this could be to their detriment, as in New Orleans more policemen died of friendly fire in the 1860s than from other causes.¹²² Professionalizing police forces had slowly begun in many cities before the war, and Reconstruction saw these efforts gradually increase, but the uneven process of developing a modern police force only truly began towards the end of the century.¹²³

Before any men titled “police” starting patrolling cities, policing duties were performed by an array of different groups—town guards, patrols, night watches, constabularies, sheriffs, or armed militias.¹²⁴ Their duties included miscellaneous tasks concerned with “the health, safety, and well-being of the urban population,” from warning of fire to surveying streets.¹²⁵ By the 1860s, the focus had narrowed to fighting urban crime and policing “disorder” or “vice,” such as drunkenness, gambling, and disorderly behavior.¹²⁶ Yet the ability to control this deviance was limited at best, by a lack of both resources and technology,¹²⁷ and a “preventative orientation” would not develop until the end of the century.¹²⁸ Rather than being respected, policemen often faced a “remarkable degree of disrespect and outright abuse” and thus needed a rough

¹¹⁹ Samuel Walker, *A Critical History of Police Reform: The Emergence of Professionalism* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1977), ix.

¹²⁰ David Ralph Johnson, *Policing the Urban Underworld: The Impact of Crime on the Development of the American Police, 1800–1887* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1979), 140, 187; Ross, *Great Kidnapping Case*, 56.

¹²¹ Malka, *The Men of Mobtown*, 37; Walker, *Critical History of Police Reform*, 13.

¹²² Dennis C. Rousey, “Cops and Guns: Police Use of Deadly Force in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans,” *American Journal of Legal History* 28, no. 1 (1984): 57.

¹²³ Malka, *The Men of Mobtown*, 63.

¹²⁴ Hadden, *Slave Patrols*, 54; Malka, *The Men of Mobtown*, 30; Sam Mitrani, *The Rise of the Chicago Police Department: Class and Conflict, 1850–1894*, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 1.

¹²⁵ Johnson, *Policing the Urban Underworld*, 7–8.

¹²⁶ Harring, *Policing a Class Society*, 29; Walker, *Critical History of Police Reform*, 24.

¹²⁷ Walker, *Critical History of Police Reform*, 24–25.

¹²⁸ Bryan Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace: Black Culture and the Police Power after Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 13; See also, Malka, *The Men of Mobtown*, 66.

attitude to enforce their will.¹²⁹ What today would be seen as brutality was commonplace¹³⁰ and, as this project will show, police officers were sometimes instigators and participants in bloody riots, rather than those trying to prevent such a slaughter.

Examining the police is of interest because the officer on his beat can be seen as the most visible “symbol of state power,”¹³¹ embodying both the state’s monopoly on the use of violence and the duty to protection derived from this.¹³² This visibility has resulted in contention, in particular as law enforcement is often “aimed at forcing people to do things they would not do voluntarily.”¹³³ In American society, which in theory prized democracy, liberty, and republicanism highly, the development of the police was a struggle between these values¹³⁴ and the desire of municipal governments, business leaders, and middle-class interests to exert control.

Subjugating African Americans in the antebellum South had principally been the planter’s prerogative in the countryside,¹³⁵ while police forces developed to control both enslaved and free black urbanites.¹³⁶ With emancipation, controlling black laborers, Christopher Waldrep among others has argued, increasingly became the state’s function and the law was substituted for the lash.¹³⁷ Thus, Emancipation “merely shifted the locus of racial police power from the amateur to the professional,”¹³⁸ making an examination of Reconstruction-era policing particularly productive. Furthermore, developments in the police may have been particularly shaped in response to the war’s consequences, such as freedpeople converging on cities, which, as Edmund Drago argues, was why many strengthened their police agencies in the 1860s.¹³⁹

The concept of the police changed significantly throughout Reconstruction, a process noticeable in a linguistic shift between the early 1860s and the late 1870s. The term “police” in itself is loaded with meaning, but as the institution has changed, so too must the term. According to the 1867 edition of *Webster’s Dictionary*, “police” could mean:

¹²⁹ Walker, *Critical History of Police Reform*, 3.

¹³⁰ Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice*, 89.

¹³¹ Haring, *Policing a Class Society*, 45.

¹³² Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace*, 4.

¹³³ Mitrani, *The Rise of the Chicago PD*, 4.

¹³⁴ Johnson, *Policing the Urban Underworld*, 9.

¹³⁵ Eric Foner, *Nothing but Freedom: Emancipation and Its Legacy* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 24.

¹³⁶ W. Marvin Dulaney, *Black Police in America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 6; Rousey, *Policing the Southern City*, 3–4.

¹³⁷ Christopher Waldrep, “Substituting Law for the Lash: Emancipation and Legal Formalism in a Mississippi County Court,” *The Journal of American History* 82, no. 4 (March 1996): 1426; See also Foner, *Nothing but Freedom*, 24–25; Haring, *Policing a Class Society*, 13.

¹³⁸ Hadden, *Slave Patrols*, 244.

¹³⁹ Drago, *Black Politicians and Reconstruction in Georgia*, 109.

“1. The government of a city or town; the administration of the laws and regulations of a city or incorporated town or borough. 2. The internal regulation and government of a kingdom or state [...]. 3. A body of civil officers, especially in cities, for enforcing the laws.”¹⁴⁰

The third definition is what a contemporary reader is most likely to envisage, yet in the early days of the Southern black press the other meanings were also frequently used. For example, the *New Orleans Tribune* argued that “[t]he police of the sea must be maintained,” meaning that order and regulation needed to be upheld between ships as well.¹⁴¹ That the term was used without an explicated definition indicates that it was already laden with meaning at the beginning of Reconstruction; therefore, this project will carefully unravel what presuppositions may have been behind the mid-nineteenth century usage of “police.” At the beginning of the period, all three usages of the term “police” that Webster’s Dictionary defines were still in roughly equal usage. However, the term increasingly became associated with the institution of law enforcement (definition three). Sources that use “police” to mean the enforcement of order more broadly (definitions one and two) will not be examined, as an emphasis is placed on the men who served as officers and how they were written about in the black press. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that the term underwent a shift in meaning, away from the broad usage to a narrower sense. This suggests that as the institution evolved and took on its modern shape, so too did the word used to describe it.

Nineteenth-century police forces were “the creatures of partisan politics [...] less a public servant than an agent for a given political faction.”¹⁴² Controlling them helped municipal politicians manipulate local politics, as they could protect their followers and harass their enemies, for example by having police break up rivaling rallies.¹⁴³ Although this made the job quite precarious—one lost election could result in mass firings—it was still “an attractive position [...] extremely well paid compared to alternative occupations.”¹⁴⁴ The significance of staffing being principally a matter of rewarding political loyalty also resulted in a mostly amateurish force, with little to no requirements or formal training prescribed until forces began to professionalize in later decades.¹⁴⁵ The political nature of the police inhibited its development and operation.

¹⁴⁰ Noah Webster and Chauncey A. Goodrich, eds., “Police,” in *An American Dictionary of the English Language: Exhibiting the Origin, Orthography, Pronunciation, and Definitions of Words* (Philadelphia, PA: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1867), 756.

¹⁴¹ *New Orleans Tribune*, November 27, 1864.

¹⁴² Walker, *Critical History of Police Reform*, 3.

¹⁴³ Johnson, *Policing the Urban Underworld*, 117–18.

¹⁴⁴ Walker, *Critical History of Police Reform*, 9.

¹⁴⁵ Johnson, *Policing the Urban Underworld*, 187; Ross, *Great Kidnapping Case*, 56.

Being able to exert more violence played a large role during elections, so no party wanted to create a powerful police force that could potentially be used against them.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, because the police was perceived as political, it often lacked “widespread acceptance by the public.”¹⁴⁷ Nonetheless, until the end of the nineteenth century, when reformers’ efforts and the changing role of municipal governments professionalized police forces, they remained an intimately political institution.¹⁴⁸

5. “The police in this city are devoted entirely to rebels”¹⁴⁹: The *New Orleans Tribune*, “Rebel Police,” and the Meaning of Freedom

Reconstruction in New Orleans began early when Union forces occupied the city in May 1862. Dr. Louis Roudanez, a distinguished Afro-Creole doctor, responded to the need for an organ to speak to and for his community by founding *L’Union* in September, inaugurating the black press in the South.¹⁵⁰ The paper was published mainly in French for two years, before being restructured into a new, bilingual paper, the *New Orleans Tribune*, which has the distinction of being America’s first daily black newspaper.¹⁵¹ Machinery and staff remained with Roudanez, including editor Paul Trévigne, likewise from New Orleans’ prosperous Afro-Creole community.¹⁵² He was joined by Belgian émigré Jean-Charles Houzeau and black Texan Charles Dallas, who had both been forced to leave their respective homes due to their political radicalism.¹⁵³ The *Tribune* quickly became one of the South’s foremost newspapers, receiving correspondence from Congress and even Europe¹⁵⁴ while providing Northerners with salient information on Southern affairs. To ensure its importance, Roudanez sent a copy of his paper to every member of Congress in Washington, as well as to major Northern newspapers.¹⁵⁵ While

¹⁴⁶ Johnson, *Policing the Urban Underworld*, 13; Ted Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction: War, Radicalism, and Race in Louisiana, 1862–1877* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 160; Walker, *Critical History of Police Reform*, 6.

¹⁴⁷ Walker, *Critical History of Police Reform*, 14.

¹⁴⁸ Johnson, *Policing the Urban Underworld*, 118.

¹⁴⁹ “Local Intelligence,” *New Orleans Tribune*, December 28, 1865.

¹⁵⁰ Davis, “Louisiana,” 151; Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, 75; Charles Vincent, *Black Legislators in Louisiana during Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 16.

¹⁵¹ Caryn C. Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718–1868* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 252; Pride and Wilson II, *History of the Black Press*, 74.

¹⁵² Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, 75.

¹⁵³ Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718–1868*, 227; Vincent, *Black Legislators in Louisiana during Reconstruction*, 25.

¹⁵⁴ Vincent, *Black Legislators in Louisiana during Reconstruction*, 26.

¹⁵⁵ Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, 114.

L'Union had “leaned to the side of those who had been free” before the war,¹⁵⁶ evinced by being published mainly in the Afro-Creole’s native French, the *Tribune* also wrote in English to speak to a larger audience, including whites and the recently freed.¹⁵⁷

The *Tribune*’s discourse on the police during the early years of Reconstruction indicates that law enforcement’s actions were deeply implicated in the struggle over the meaning of freedom. While Union victory had emancipated the enslaved, how precisely Southern society would be restructured to accommodate this freedom was unclear and remained an ongoing process throughout Reconstruction. When Democrats still controlled New Orleans, the *Tribune* was overwhelmingly antagonistic towards the police, voicing disapproval during several incidents when officers restricted the new rights of African Americans. The incidents during which the police were most prominent and thus criticized most vociferously in the *Tribune* are illustrative of the discursive strategies the newspaper pursued. When municipal authorities harassed black churches in New Orleans, editors created a narrative contrasting the villainous police with the virtuous churchgoers. To underscore the injustice in vagrancy laws, the *Tribune* adopted the authority of powerful white men by printing their words. Presidential Reconstruction’s culmination, the 1866 New Orleans massacre, was emphatically condemned by the paper, with a particular focus on the “rebel” police.

During the summer of 1865, the *Tribune*’s reporting on the police focused on what the paper saw as harassment of New Orleans’ African American churches. White policemen interrupted evening services to enforce an ordinance that forbade meetings after 9 p.m. The *Tribune* understood this as a resurgence of the antebellum order, condemning the interference vehemently: “Slavery is abolished,” they remarked, but “the old pro slavery regulations and ordinances [have been] revived.”¹⁵⁸ To convince readers of the police’s wrongdoing, the paper adopted a strategy that William Haskins has outlined as being central to the Reconstruction-era black press. To construct a vision of equality, he argues, the black press established “villains and heroes who act out [...] dramatic plots.”¹⁵⁹ For the *Tribune*, white policemen were the villains, in opposition to whom stood the virtuous black congregants. Each group’s characters were reinforced through contrast to one another.

¹⁵⁶ Davis, “Louisiana,” 157.

¹⁵⁷ Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718–1868*, 252.

¹⁵⁸ “The Nine O’Clock Rule,” *New Orleans Tribune*, July 19, 1865.

¹⁵⁹ William A. Haskins, “Rhetorical Vision of Equality: Analysis of the Rhetoric of the Southern Black Press during Reconstruction,” *Communication Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (March 1981): 117.

The *Tribune* created a “dramatic plot” around the police’s interference by adopting a somewhat sensationalist style of reporting. “[A]t the fatal strike of nine P.M.,” the church service was “interrupted [...] by the police,”¹⁶⁰ they wrote. The editors referred to this as an “illegal intervention,”¹⁶¹ thus establishing which side they were on. The stakes set by the editors were also high, as they argued that the interference challenged the notion of equality before the law,¹⁶² thereby threatening to invalidate the sacrifices made in the Civil War. “Will the nation give up the great idea that sustained the masses during this momentous struggle? Will the North accept her virtual defeat, after so many victories in the field,” the *Tribune* dramatically asked its readers. Yet instead of representing a rhetorical device, the question was emphatically answered: defeat “remains yet to be decided—and to be fought again if need be,”¹⁶³ thus setting the confident tone with which the *Tribune* argued that the police’s villainous interference needed to end.

In the conflict over church closures, the *Tribune* established the black churchgoers’ virtues to emphasize the police’s malignancy and thereby also to construct an affirmative image of freedpeople more generally. First, the *Tribune* pointed out that one of the molested churches was “principally composed of women, who sing hymns and recite prayers.”¹⁶⁴ Thus, they suggested that the police’s interference was discourteous because it breached gender roles. According to nineteenth-century mores the male police officers would not be sanctioned to arrest women—at least not those of good standing—further underscoring that their actions were an obscene interference.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, the protected category of childhood was also invoked in an article pointing out that the congregation included and children¹⁶⁶ thus implying that the police overlooked their innocence.¹⁶⁷ Indirectly, the editors were arguing that black women and children deserve the same protection from men and violence that white ones enjoyed. The struggle over church interference can thus also be understood as a campaign for the right to protection of women and children, qua their gendered and aged positions respectively.

¹⁶⁰ “Our Commissioner of Freedmen Set at Defiance by the N. O. Police,” *New Orleans Tribune*, July 30, 1865.

¹⁶¹ “News of the Day: Another Church Closed Up,” *New Orleans Tribune*, June 30, 1865; the *Tribune* also wrote of an “unlawful interference” by the police in another issue, using a strikingly synonymous phrase, “News of the Day,” *New Orleans Tribune*, June 22, 1865.

¹⁶² “News of the Day,” *New Orleans Tribune*, June 22, 1865; “The Nine O’Clock Rule,” *New Orleans Tribune*, July 19, 1865.

¹⁶³ “The Nine O’Clock Rule,” *New Orleans Tribune*, July 19, 1865.

¹⁶⁴ “A Few Facts About Freed Men and Colored People,” *New Orleans Tribune*, July 9, 1865.

¹⁶⁵ Rousey, *Policing the Southern City*, 134.

¹⁶⁶ “Our Commissioner of Freedmen Set at Defiance by the N. O. Police,” *New Orleans Tribune*, July 30, 1865.

¹⁶⁷ Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood and Race from Slavery to Civil Rights*. (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2012), 4, 16.

The *Tribune* contrasted the virtuousness of the black congregations with the debauchery of white revelers, whose meetings were not interfered with by the police. This emphasized the injustice of the curfew but was also part of the collective effort of the black press to create a positive (self-) image for freedpeople. While the women and children were in church right next door, there was a “private house where Confederate revels are freely held, to the hindrance of the neighborhood and to the contempt of the respect due to the Republic.”¹⁶⁸ The implicit argument by the *Tribune* is twofold. First, the private fete is what disturbed the neighborhood peace, yet the respectful black church meeting was shut down by the police—thus, the wrong group had been interfered with. Secondly, the revelers are accused of being Confederates and disloyal. This claim may have targeted white, pro-Union readers in particular, as in contrast to the treacherous partyers, the congregation was “praying for the soul of President Lincoln.”¹⁶⁹ To make their argument, the *Tribune* clearly did not shy away from invoking painful memories of the Civil War era. The degree of pathos the editors were willing to employ suggests how crucial the matter of the church curfew was for them. In contrast to the white revelers, the black congregation’s propriety is also emphasized, as “[n]ever a single complaint was made against” them, the *Tribune* claims.¹⁷⁰ Displaying respectability was a way to potentially win white allies¹⁷¹ and can also be understood as an effort to contradict what Suggs calls the “myth of black cultural inferiority.”¹⁷² It was “the Confederates” who kept their neighbors awake “vociferating, singing, cursing and quarreling,”¹⁷³ while the black churchgoers behaved admirably. But the *Tribune* further elucidated that they understood racism to be the root of the problem, and clearly pointed this out: “The religious meetings to which the nine o’clock rule is applied, are, of course, composed of persons of color. White persons are tolerated to sing, cry, get drunk, abuse the United States Government and make scandal the whole night, if they please.”¹⁷⁴ Yet while the white revelers behaved contemptibly, the strongest criticism was reserved for the policemen who enforced the slave-era ordinance.

For the *Tribune*, the police were acting villainously in their interference with the black churches: “We clearly see,” wrote the paper, “that the colored people of this city are kept, by

¹⁶⁸ “News of the Day,” *New Orleans Tribune*, June 22, 1865.

¹⁶⁹ “A Few Facts About Freed Men and Colored People,” *New Orleans Tribune*, July 9, 1865; “The Nine O’Clock Rule,” *New Orleans Tribune*, July 19, 1865.

¹⁷⁰ “News of the Day,” *New Orleans Tribune*, June 22, 1865.

¹⁷¹ Clark, *Defining Moments*, 5.

¹⁷² Suggs, “Conclusion: An Interpretive History of the Black Press in the Middle West, 1865–1985,” 358.

¹⁷³ “The Nine O’Clock Rule,” *New Orleans Tribune*, July 19, 1865.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

the municipal police, under a constant process of vexation.”¹⁷⁵ The *Tribune* criticized the officers in an individualized manner, complaining of the “antagonism exhibited by these men toward the liberty enjoyed by the colored population,” which they saw in the use of “clubs upon the floors of the meeting-houses, creating such a noise as to break up the meetings and send the poor people home in a state of fright and discouragement.”¹⁷⁶ On the one hand, thus focusing on the officers’ character indicates the extent to which law enforcement was still understood not to be an institutional matter but highly dependent on the individual policeman’s integrity.¹⁷⁷ On the other hand, it is surprising that the *Tribune* employed this style of argument, contrasting villainous officers with virtuous churchgoers, because the paper itself acknowledged that this struggle was also one between the mayor and the military occupation over who had legitimate authority in the city. A congregant opposed the police’s interference, claiming that there was no curfew ordered, yet a policeman retorted that “he did not care for the Provost Marshal, and the city intends to look after its own business.”¹⁷⁸ This incident repeated itself with an officer more directly saying “in a language too disrespectful to be printed, that he does not care for any authority” except the mayor.¹⁷⁹ This is indicative of the power struggle in Louisiana during Presidential Reconstruction. Yet the *Tribune* focused its vilification on the direct consequence this struggle had for New Orleans’ freedpeople, constructing a juxtaposition between them and the police to argue for their vision of equality, in which those meetings that disturbed no one should not be interfered with by the police. As the paper boasted, the *Tribune*’s side triumphed. The last time the officers returned they did not interfere because they “acknowledged that they have found some power superior to their ‘loyal Mayor,’”¹⁸⁰ namely, the military authorities. Thus, the paper had involved itself in this struggle with the police over the meaning of freedom, not shying away from taking the partisan position of the black churchgoers and had thereby been able to celebrate a victory after the federal government interfered.

During the incident over black churches, a peculiarity exists in the *Tribune*’s pages. Although the paper was heavily criticizing the police, there are also two instances in which it lauded the institution, both of which are found in the “Local Intelligence” section. Reporting on a specific arrest, the *Tribune* wrote that an “efficient police officer” detained two men who were

¹⁷⁵ “News of the Day: Another Church Closed Up,” *New Orleans Tribune*, June 30, 1865.

¹⁷⁶ “The Freedmen of Louisiana,” *New Orleans Tribune*, October 10, 1865.

¹⁷⁷ Rousey, “Black Policemen in New Orleans During Reconstruction,” 243.

¹⁷⁸ “A Few Facts About Freed Men and Colored People,” *New Orleans Tribune*, July 9, 1865.

¹⁷⁹ “Our Commissioner of Freedmen Set at Defiance by the N. O. Police,” *New Orleans Tribune*, July 30, 1865.

¹⁸⁰ “The Churches to be Let Alone,” *New Orleans Tribune*, August 1, 1865.

“dangerous and suspicious.”¹⁸¹ Perhaps this commendation was published even though there was a more general struggle against the force because it concerned singular actions deemed laudable. Thus, the *Tribune* evinced a readiness not to judge the institution as a whole but to carefully assess individual officers. This may have been a strategy pursued by the editors to display their “moderation and civility” and thereby prove their respectability, which Richard Abbott argues was one method with which Republican editors in the South hoped “to win a hearing for their views.”¹⁸² The praise, however, was also more generally directed, with the *Tribune* claiming that “the police is always on the alert and ready to arrest the disturbers of the public peace.”¹⁸³ Given the embroilment in a struggle precisely over which disturbers the police could and should interfere with—arguing that the black congregants did not belong to this category while Confederate revelers did—it is surprising to find such an unequivocal defense of the police’s actions. If this is understood as an intentional inclusion, then it may point to the editors continuing what Gardner argues was a “tradition of multi-vocality” in the antebellum press, which viewed “some forms of dissent as healthy.”¹⁸⁴ However, given that these laudations were in the “Local Intelligence” section, while the criticisms were in the general reporting, there is also the possibility that this multivocality was not a calculated strategy to display civility but stemmed from the collaborative and haphazard nature of black press publishing more generally.¹⁸⁵ Perhaps different authors or editors worked on the different sections without communicating this apparent contradiction. The mixture of compliment and criticism during a period of struggle with the police indicates that even in a single newspaper the discourse cannot be understood as smooth and coherent but as an assemblage of sometimes discordant statements.

Another incident that enraged the *Tribune* was the police’s enforcement of vagrancy laws. The paper’s most vociferous criticism of this practice, however, was not in their own words. Instead, they printed a report from assistant commissioner of the Freedmen’s Bureau in Louisiana, Thomas W. Conway, to his superior, and added an editorial comment emphasizing that the paper agreed with his remarks. By using Conway’s words, the *Tribune* appropriated his authority and were perhaps able to put forward their more radical ideas, hidden behind the protective mantle of whiteness. Black newspapermen were in constant danger in the South,¹⁸⁶ so perhaps

¹⁸¹ “Local Intelligence,” *New Orleans Tribune*, July 23, 1865.

¹⁸² Abbott, *For Free Press and Equal Rights*, 100.

¹⁸³ “Local Intelligence,” *New Orleans Tribune*, June 21, 1865.

¹⁸⁴ Gardner, “Early African American Print Culture,” 81.

¹⁸⁵ DeLombard, “African American Cultures of Print,” 367; Osthaus, *Partisans of the Southern Press*, 209.

¹⁸⁶ Suggs, “Introduction,” 1983, ix.

the harsher criticism of the police was thus obfuscated in the hope that the consequence for printing it was not as great. Nonetheless, because in other instances the *Tribune* was often audacious in their combativeness, this may have only been a secondary motivation behind using Conway's report to criticize the police.

The article suggests that the *Tribune* may have also had a white audience in mind and were adopting Conway's report to speak to them. Before the war, there had always been "curious white readers" of the black press,¹⁸⁷ and as Roudanez had a copy of his paper sent to members of Congress,¹⁸⁸ it is likely that the *Tribune* was attentive to potential for a white readership. Moreover, as a quasi-Republican paper, the *Tribune* perhaps was also helping pursue the party's mission of gaining white support in the South while not losing black votes in the process,¹⁸⁹ for which Conway's report would have been particularly well-suited. Printing a white man's opinion on the issue of arrests for vagrancy might have aided this purpose, as it demonstrated that not only African Americans believed the police was mistreating them—at least one authoritative white man agreed with them. In another article, the *Tribune* applies the same strategy, qualifying a claim that "police are by far more indulgence [sic] with the white people" by explaining that they had been told so by a "gentleman worthy of confidence."¹⁹⁰ Although not explicitly white, the *Tribune*'s editors regarded it as important to support more severe allegations against the police with the words of esteemed sources. Crucially, by printing the words of white men in positions of authority or respect, the *Tribune* was also adopting the speakers' authority and legitimacy on the matter.

The *Tribune* is candid in some of their reasons for printing Conway's report, while other possible motivations can only be hypothesized. In the opening, the paper explains that one rationale behind reproducing the report was that it "is full of precious materials for this period of our local history."¹⁹¹ This directly supports Foster's claim that one of the black press's missions was "to create and to preserve their history for themselves and for others."¹⁹² More importantly, the *Tribune* further explains that they printed the report because it does "justice to the freedmen [...] about the eternal calumny of idleness and vagrancy, thrown to the face of the subjugated

¹⁸⁷ Frankie Hutton, "Social Morality in the Antebellum Black Press," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 26, no. 2 (September 1992): 71.

¹⁸⁸ Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, 114.

¹⁸⁹ Abbott, *For Free Press and Equal Rights*, 104.

¹⁹⁰ "Local Intelligence," *New Orleans Tribune*, October 29, 1865.

¹⁹¹ "The Freedmen of Louisiana," *New Orleans Tribune*, October 10, 1865.

¹⁹² Foster, "A Narrative of the Interesting Origins and (Somewhat) Surprising Developments of African-American Print Culture," 723.

race.”¹⁹³ This professed support of Conway and celebration of his report reads as somewhat excessive. However, Conway himself wrote even more melodramatically, proclaiming that “[t]he injustice [...], inflicted upon the freedmen at the hand of the New Orleans police, can hardly find its equal in the history of any city in Christendom.”¹⁹⁴ It seems reasonable to suggest that the *Tribune*’s editors reprinted the report because of its tone. Although the statement is hyperbolic, it is not the *Tribune*’s own words and thus may not have been interpreted as improper sensationalism. Yet Conway’s report is the most dramatic criticism of police practices found in the New Orleans black newspaper, suggesting that the editors took this liberty precisely because it was written by a white man with authority.

Just over a year after the end of the Civil War, a biracial state constitutional convention met at the New Orleans Mechanics’ Institute. The most anticipated and controversial item on the agenda was the question of enfranchising African American men, whilst disenfranchising those white men who had fought for the Confederacy.¹⁹⁵ The convention was attacked by incensed white men, killing over thirty black men during a brutal riot.¹⁹⁶ New Orleans’ police force is understood to have played a central role in precipitating and carrying out the massacre,¹⁹⁷ a fact the *New Orleans Tribune* stressed in the wake of the attack.¹⁹⁸ The killings were a critical moment in the newspaper’s discourse on the police because they intensified denunciations of the officers’ actions and led to the ultimate rejection of the Democrat-led force. Most noticeably, after the massacre the *Tribune* adopted the moniker “rebel police” to excoriate the officers.

The *New Orleans Tribune* did not shy away from disparaging their white Southern opponents as “rebels.” However, before the 1866 massacre, the editors did not directly brand the police as such, claiming instead that the police was “pro-rebel.”¹⁹⁹ The gap is small, but it is important that this statement is not identical to denouncing the police officers as being “rebels” themselves, as is done later. The *Tribune* wrote: “It is known that the only aim of the generality of our policemen seems to be to please the white population, that is the rebels.”²⁰⁰ The slight

¹⁹³ “The Freedmen of Louisiana,” *New Orleans Tribune*, October 10, 1865.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718–1868*, 261.

¹⁹⁶ Ross, *Great Kidnapping Case*, 35.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*; Mark W. Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion: A New History of Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 96.

¹⁹⁸ “The New Orleans Massacre,” *New Orleans Tribune*, August 8, 1866.

¹⁹⁹ “From Boston,” *New Orleans Tribune*, August 30, 1865.

²⁰⁰ “Local Intelligence,” *New Orleans Tribune*, December 27, 1865.

distinction made suggests that at this point the *Tribune* perhaps did not believe the police to be fully antagonistic to them, or that they were writing carefully so as not to affront them. Nonetheless, the paper was also willing to use emotive and dramatic language to attack police practices. “[T]he police in this city are devoted entirely to the rebels,” they wrote, once again making the slight distinction, but continued by writing that the police “are willing to assist the latter to quench their thirst for negro blood, and they are not to be relied upon.”²⁰¹ This condemnation is the most severe uttered by the *Tribune* before the massacre, indicating that relations with the police were already poor. However, perhaps hoping for better terms, the newspaper still shied away from castigating the police as “rebel.”

The police-led riot at the Mechanics’ Institute quashed all such distance. The *Tribune* titled an article “The N. O. Police Made Up of Returned Confederates,”²⁰² making their impression unmistakable. This claim was not baseless, given that New Orleans Mayor John T. Monroe himself conceded that a majority of his officers had fought for the South in the Civil War.²⁰³ In fact, during the Mechanics’ Institute riot the police chief and the sheriff of New Orleans parish, who participated in the turmoil, were both ex-Confederates.²⁰⁴ However, with the exemption of the above-cited article, the *Tribune* quickly preferred to label the police as “rebel” rather than any of the available alternatives, such as (ex-) Confederate. This discursive construction became so established that, even a year after the massacre, they were still writing of “rebel police” in Mobile, Alabama, who during a riot in the port town had “acted nearly as badly as that of New Orleans.”²⁰⁵ Why, precisely, did the *Tribune* then prefer to label the police as “rebel”?

On a basic level, the term was still accessible to the *Tribune*’s writers and readers, given that the massacre occurred just over a year after the end of the Civil War. During the conflict, the Union had used the term to emphasize the insurrectionist character of the South’s secession, implying that this act “and the ensuing hostilities were illegal, immoral, and downright wrong.”²⁰⁶ The *Tribune* may have also opted to use “rebel” rather than “Confederate” for a similar reason, accentuating the villainy of the police’s actions rather than allowing some form of legitimacy by adopting their self-selected title. Moreover, the Civil War had loaded words such

²⁰¹ “Local Intelligence,” *New Orleans Tribune*, December 28, 1865.

²⁰² “The N. O. Police Made Up Of Returned Confederates,” *New Orleans Tribune*, September 6, 1866.

²⁰³ Rousey, *Policing the Southern City*, 115.

²⁰⁴ Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718–1868*, 271.

²⁰⁵ “The Mobile Riot,” *New Orleans Tribune*, May 18, 1867.

²⁰⁶ William L Richter, *The A to Z of the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 17.

as “rebel” with “emotional meanings”²⁰⁷ and the *Tribune* was tapping into this, trying to evoke these attitudes in the readers. Crucially, adopting the war-time terminology also indicates that the paper interpreted the massacre as a continuation of the hostilities, and perhaps the term was specifically meant to drive this point home with its audience. In doing so, the black newspaper was not alone. As Abbott argues, Republican papers for several years after the war “referred to their opponents as rebels.” He proposes that this was done to keep “the memories of wartime atrocities alive,” but also as a political endeavor designed to identify Democrats with “the suffering and death produced by the Civil War.”²⁰⁸ It seems likely that the *Tribune* chose to name the police “rebel” after the massacre for these reasons as well, intensifying their language in response to the re-escalated violence they had witnessed during the New Orleans massacre.

Though surrender at Appomattox effectively ceased official hostilities between the Union and the Confederacy, the *Tribune*’s writing on the 1866 massacre suggests they interpreted the violence as a continuation of the war. Calling the police “rebel” implies that the editors understood them to be the adversary in this ongoing conflict, and the term perhaps was used precisely to make this point. A year after the massacre, the paper drew a graphic scene in a remembrance piece, writing of a “nefarious day” when

defenseless people [were] murdered in cold blood, innocent men pursued from house to house [...] the assassins deeping [sic] their handkerchiefs in the blood of Unionists to carry them as trophies, black children taken out of the city cars and mercilessly murdered on the sidewalks of Canal street, wounded men piled up in carts and fired at by the rebel police, dying men refused a drop of water, prisoners inhumanely treated in the cells of the City Hall and threatened with being hung within a few hours. These are some of the horrors committed on that day.²⁰⁹

That the term “rebel police” is used even a year later indicates how this discursive formation had solidified. Overall, the editors remind readers of how violently the police had acted, perhaps to demonstrate that the continued violence African Americans were experiencing felt like a war, reinforcing this with dramatic imagery. The *Tribune*’s more radical leaning is on display here, as arguing that the war was ongoing may have aimed at countering the general leniency being shown to former Confederates. William Blair argues that the leniency was “crafted to end the fighting, to encourage reunion, and to deny further resistance by creating martyrs.”²¹⁰ Perhaps

²⁰⁷ Richard White, *The Republic for Which It Stands: The United States during Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, 1865–1896*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 254.

²⁰⁸ Abbott, *For Free Press and Equal Rights*, 108.

²⁰⁹ “The Thirtieth of July,” *New Orleans Tribune*, July 30, 1867.

²¹⁰ William A. Blair, “Finding the Ending of America’s Civil War,” *American Historical Review* 120, no. 5 (December 2015): 1760.

the *Tribune* was writing of the “rebel police” and their heinous actions to counter this strategy, demonstrating that the war was an ongoing issue for them. Simultaneously, the sensationalist language may have also aimed at galvanizing supporters, or it may represent an attempt at re-lighting the wartime fervor needed to counter the ongoing insurgency. The event influenced the course of Reconstruction and was an inciting moment for the shift towards a more radical approach in Washington.²¹¹ The *Tribune* contributed to this, and William Conner has suggested they were at the height of their influence while doing so.²¹²

Although the *Tribune* wrote about the police during specific incidents, such as the New Orleans massacre or when they imposed a curfew on African American churches, the day-to-day activities were neither directly reported nor directly commented on by the newspaper. This may be because the law enforcement agents were not a particularly important institution until the latter part of the nineteenth century, but it may also possibly reflect that the newspaper men’s outlook was influenced by a classist perspective.

Indirectly, the *Tribune*’s pages contained information related to the police in the form of “Local Intelligence,” a daily section that noted significant events from the city’s law enforcement agencies. Most of the material was sourced from different courts, thus the majority of reporting was on arrests, fines, and verdicts. The paper’s audience is likely to have expected this information, yet it does not seem to have been a high priority for the editors, given that there was rarely more than a single line dedicated to an event. From a journalistic perspective, the “Local Intelligence” is also dubious, as the *Tribune* seems to have accepted much of the information given by the police without question. For example, they write without further comment that a thirty-year-old woman “died suddenly [...] of general debility” at the police’s main station.²¹³ Perhaps further investigation into the matter was deemed unnecessary by the journalist responsible for collating this information due to factors such as the woman’s class. Nonetheless, the authorities’ position was likely to have also been accepted without skepticism because of economic restraints, as the basic information was easily accessible through the courts’ and police’s records, yet further investigation required an extra effort, something seemingly not deemed worthwhile. Overall, the treatment of the “Local Intelligence” section by the *Tribune* suggests that the editors preferred to concern themselves with more grandiose matters, such as

²¹¹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 262–63.

²¹² William P. Connor, “Reconstruction Rebels: The New Orleans Tribune in Post-War Louisiana,” *Louisiana History* 21, no. 2 (Spring 1980): 177–78.

²¹³ “Local Intelligence,” *New Orleans Tribune*, July 25, 1865.

the debates on the meaning of rights, rather than the everyday actions of the police. Yet this section of the paper may also deliver further insights, as it is a highly idiosyncratic one. On some days, the section was written in a sober tone only including strait-laced reporting of police and court cases. On other days, the section was written in tongue-in-cheek style, with comments such as “John Dorman indulged too much the repeated times of lifting his elbow to bring the tumbler to his lips, set him crazy.”²¹⁴ This suggests that the *Tribune* was dabbling with sensationalism, perhaps expecting the information on crime to attract readers. However, if this is the case, then they were neither successful nor persistent in trying to create stories at all costs, since on some days they would dispassionately point out that there was “nothing of interest among the police.”²¹⁵

Although the “Local Intelligence” section contained daily information sourced from the police, the *Tribune* otherwise showed little interest in the police’s regular activities. This may have been because little policing occurred, yet it could also be the case that the policing that did occur was not deemed newsworthy. After all, what editors considered to even be “news” goes beyond “impersonal market forces,” depending on the newspaper’s “political and cultural agendas,”²¹⁶ and there are reasons suggesting that the *Tribune*’s class outlook influenced their reporting significantly.

The *Tribune*’s lack of reporting on the police’s daily activities suggests that the police may indeed not have been very important in the mid-nineteenth century, as distinguished historian of police Samuel Walker suggests. Until the turn of the century, policing was “more of a token gesture than a systemic effort,”²¹⁷ Walker argues. This was mainly due to a lack of manpower and the fact that the personnel could not yet be used effectively through technological innovations, such as telegraph boxes. Although the ratio of policemen to population has remained remarkably stable in New Orleans at 3.4 officers per 1,000 residents,²¹⁸ without so much as a station wagon, Reconstruction era policing consisted mostly of an officer patrolling his beat. Beyond this regular route, police were rarely able to exert much power, and thus most parts of a city saw only little policing.²¹⁹ The fact that the police was not a particularly powerful

²¹⁴ “Local Intelligence,” *New Orleans Tribune*, May 5, 1865.

²¹⁵ “Local Intelligence,” *New Orleans Tribune*, July 21, 1865.

²¹⁶ Nerone, “Newspapers and the Public Sphere,” 241.

²¹⁷ Walker, *Critical History of Police Reform*, 20–21, 24.

²¹⁸ In the 1860s, New Orleans had roughly 650 officers with a population of 19,000. See Rousey, “Black Policemen in New Orleans During Reconstruction,” 225; US Census Bureau, “1870 Census: Volume 1. The Statistics of the Population of the United States,” Census.gov, 34.

²¹⁹ Walker, *Critical History of Police Reform*, 21.

institution may be one reason why the *Tribune* reported so little on their actions, outside of momentous situations such as the 1866 massacre, when policemen would abruptly become unavoidable.

An important caveat to the suggestion that the police was mostly absent in the lives of nineteenth-century New Orleanians is that this lack of attention was distributed unequally, with African Americans being a focus of law enforcement's attention in the South.²²⁰ Race, however, was not the only factor that influenced the amount of interactions residents had with the police, as the officers were tasked primarily with supervising the lower classes, particularly when these exhibited behavior that deviated from middle- and upper-class standards.²²¹ The *Tribune*, however, was owned and operated by men who would likely not have been the focus of police activity on account of their class positions. Owner Dr. Louis Roudanez was, after all, a preeminent member of New Orleans' Afro-Creole community.²²² Moreover, as the black press's audience, too, was primarily from the African American middle class and upwards,²²³ it is likely that the *Tribune* was catering to their interests by not focusing on police activities which did not affect them directly. Furthermore, the lack of reporting on everyday policing of deviant behavior and so-called disorder also suggests a tacit agreement with it. At the least, the editors did not question why the publicly intoxicated, gamblers, or others causing a public nuisance would be targeted for arrest, possibly because they consented to the police's role as custodian of middle-class order. This discursive gap points to the police having become naturalized as an institution in these regards. As Mills explains, discursive "practices of exclusion" are perhaps what creates the "naturalness" of that which seems "self-evident," or "almost unsayable."²²⁴ Perhaps questioning whether the police should enforce middle-class mores, often violently doing so, was not just unsayable for the *Tribune*'s editors but even unthinkable because this was their understanding of the police's legitimate role in society.

Nonetheless, deciphering the meaning of a discursive gap is challenging and, due to the manifold competing possible interpretations, no single one should be advanced without powerful evidence. Further research is needed to investigate whether it truly was class concerns that most influenced the *Tribune*'s reporting on everyday police interactions. Alternative explanations could be that they were avoiding the topic of crime in general, as this was associated with

²²⁰ For the relationship between race and the police see chap. 4, 19.

²²¹ Haring, *Policing a Class Society*, 11, 29.

²²² Davis, "Louisiana," 151.

²²³ Hutton, "Social Morality in the Antebellum Black Press," 71.

²²⁴ Mills, *Discourse*, 11.

a more sensationalist style of journalism which the editors did not ascribe to, instead focusing on an audience that believed itself to be more sophisticated, including politicians, businessmen, and the upper and middle class.²²⁵ In contrast, perhaps issues of race did indeed strongly influence the *Tribune*'s choices and, similar to the antebellum black press, they may have skirted reporting on crime because of its racial connotations. As Brian Baaki argues, Frederick Douglass's *Freedom's Journal* "purposefully reverses the negative stereotype of blacks and crime [...] by exclusively reporting on the criminal actions of whites."²²⁶ Even just criticizing police actions against African Americans might have helped perpetuate the stereotype of black criminality, which the editors may have consciously chosen to avoid, thus displaying a "race-consciousness designed to present blacks' [...] struggles in a positive way."²²⁷ Furthermore, the antebellum black press avoided writing about the worst parts of the African American experience as a form of resistance, instead making "it a point to give witness to the other, better side of their communities."²²⁸ Although the *Tribune* did write of singularly appalling events and reported on the sometimes disastrous situation in the South, perhaps they avoided writing of daily heinousness for similar reasons to antebellum editors. In this reading, the discursive silence can be seen as a conscious strategic choice made by the *Tribune*. This is perhaps a fruitful avenue for future research, as it emphasizes the editor's agency in reporting on the causes and effects of policing. Lastly, it needs to be noted that the Reconstruction period was astonishingly violent in the South. Dennis Rousey points out that "the war had exacerbated an already extreme proclivity for personal violence among New Orleanians."²²⁹ Perhaps the police's daily activities were too mundane, in comparison, to be noticed by the editors, or were assumed to not be of interest to a readership constantly confronted with brutality.

A further interpretation of the silence on the police's everyday actions is to read it as tacit approval. The *Tribune* plainly stated their agreement to the existence of the force, writing that "the police is always on the alert and ready to arrest the disturbers of the public peace."²³⁰ Moreover, they even complained that, although there were "new orders [...] to place under police

²²⁵ For an investigation into the differences between the early sensationalist and the more refined "sixpenny" press, see Andie Tucher, *Froth and Scum: Truth, Beauty, Goodness, and the Ax Murder in America's First Mass Medium*, New ed. (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 7–11.

²²⁶ Brian Baaki, "White Crime and the Early African American Press: Elements of Reprinting and Reporting in New York's *Freedom's Journal*," *American Periodicals* 29, no. 2 (2019): 121.

²²⁷ T. Ella Strother, "The Race-Advocacy Function of the Black Press," *Black American Literature Forum* 12, no. 3 (Autumn 1978): 92.

²²⁸ Hutton, *The Early Black Press*, xii.

²²⁹ Rousey, *Policing the Southern City*, 151; See also Emberton, *Beyond Redemption*, 75.

²³⁰ "Local Intelligence," *New Orleans Tribune*, June 21, 1865.

surveillance the gamblers, thugs and loafers” which “are very stringent in their wording,” they doubted that “like many others of that kind, they will never be enforced.”²³¹ Herein the newspaper adopted an adversarial language towards those being arrested, using depreciatory names, strongly indicating that they appreciated the police’s work when it targeted these people. Understanding the silence as approval raises the important point that the black press authors’ circumstance of belonging to an oppressed people did not automatically translate into a dislike of the police. When law enforcement brazenly targeted African Americans for racist reasons, the *Tribune* realized and criticized this. In the more subtle instances where racialized motivations were blended with class issues, or in questions of disorder, it appears that the editors also had a more complicated opinion of the police.

Although the *Tribune* abundantly invoked equality before the law to argue that there should be “no distinction between races and colors”²³² when police officers were hired, this reasoning was not fully extended to class-based distinctions, and gender-based discrimination was likely beyond the horizon of the thinkable. Class was briefly an issue for the *Tribune* in an article fittingly entitled “The Rich and the Poor”²³³ in which they criticized a plan by New Orleans’ city government to only allow men “endorsed by ten property-holders or ten tax payers, that is to say by ten rich citizens”²³⁴ to be employed on the police force. Although only mentioned once in the paper, this seems to have incensed the editors, as they invoked the full array of counter-arguments to explain why such a requirement was inappropriate: it was against the equality of the law, antithetical to democracy, would revive “the old feud between the rich and the poor,” and be “an insult to the army, to the Republic, to the nation at large.”²³⁵ However, the *Tribune*’s issue with the requirement was not about who could even become a policeman but who would control the staffing as such and that it would be “to visibly and exclusively submit that class of public officers to the control of a particular class of citizens.” Concerning the class background of the policemen to be hired, the newspaper wrote nothing directly, only implying that they should conform to middle-class mores, perhaps because class restrictions would have precluded most African American New Orleanians from serving on the force. On the other hand, the complete lack of contemplation about the role of gender in police staffing suggests that this discursive silence arose from a limit on what was even thinkable for the *Tribune*’s editors. To catch

²³¹ “Local News,” *New Orleans Tribune*, June 15, 1865.

²³² “No Colored Man Appointed,” *New Orleans Tribune*, May 10, 1867.

²³³ “The Rich and the Poor,” *New Orleans Tribune*, June 6, 1865.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

perpetrators verbally harassing women *in flagrante*, policemen dressed as women, the paper reported.²³⁶ Yet there is no inkling that the newspaper men believed this job could have been done by female officers instead. The discursive gap concerning women serving on the police force strongly suggests that this was “simply unimaginable”²³⁷ for the *Tribune*’s editors, who likely understood police officer to be a role naturally staffed only by men. Indeed, while some African American men were employed as police officers during the Reconstruction era, it would take more than another generation until the first female officers were employed in the 1910s.²³⁸

The New Orleans massacre of 1866 had most strikingly proven to the *Tribune* that ex-Confederate police officers, hired by a Democratic mayor, would not concede that African Americans had won political and civil rights. Slavery was dead in name, but the actions of these policemen continued upholding the old system. However, the *Tribune* would not begin arguing for an alternative to “rebel” policemen until the Crescent City inaugurated its first Republican mayor, Edward Heath, on March 28, 1867.²³⁹ This momentous shift in power was the beginning of Radical Reconstruction in the city, and in turn the *Tribune*’s discourse on policing markedly shifted. Only once Republicans had taken power did the newspaper begin to argue for black men to be hired as police, pressuring the mayor to act on this matter. Thus, a shift in discourse followed a shift in power. The *Tribune*’s arguments indicate that they perhaps believed it to be futile to argue for black policemen before, when it was unlikely that those in power would listen. The transition towards a more radical Reconstruction on a local level opened the possibility of African American appointments to the police and the *Tribune* responded to this.

The mid-nineteenth-century police was fundamentally political in nature and served municipal governments as “one of the largest sources of patronage available.”²⁴⁰ Therefore, when Republicans gained control of New Orleans’ city hall, the *Tribune* also expected the old police to be replaced with new men. Two months after Heath’s inauguration, the *Tribune* voiced their dissatisfaction with the speed of the process, writing polemically that “[e]very one in the land wondered at seeing a Republican Mayor keep for his police Monroe’s minions.”²⁴¹ It is of note that the editors chose not to call the police “rebel,” as they often did after the 1866 massacre,

²³⁶ “Various Items,” *New Orleans Tribune*, May 19, 1867.

²³⁷ Shortell, “The Rhetoric of Black Abolitionism: An Exploratory Analysis of Antislavery Newspapers in New York State,” 104.

²³⁸ Lawrence M. Friedman, *Crime and Punishment in American History* (New York, NY: BasicBooks, 1993), 364.

²³⁹ “Local Intelligence: Inauguration of the New Mayor,” *New Orleans Times*, March 29, 1867.

²⁴⁰ Johnson, *Policing the Urban Underworld*, 113.

²⁴¹ “No Colored Man Appointed,” *New Orleans Tribune*, May 10, 1876.

but instead emphasize their role as lackey of the previous, politically antagonistic, Mayor Monroe. This strongly suggests that the *Tribune* was trying to use its platform to convince the new Mayor Heath and his Republican allies to reconstitute the police force by emphasizing the officers' partisanship. Moreover, the *Tribune* continues to discredit Mayor Heath, perhaps trying to shame him into changing the officers by writing that "[a]mong the sad characteristics of the so-called Republican administration [...] was the long retention in office of the very men who had taken part in the riot at the Mechanics' Institute."²⁴² The infamous massacre is invoked here, but it seems not to be the argumentative focus, with the police's involvement in partisan politics instead being more important for the *Tribune*. The newspaper's editors were involving themselves in city politics, skillfully applying the argument they saw as most suitable to the situation. Perhaps they did not believe that Mayor Heath could be convinced to fire the "rebel" police by highlighting the crimes they had committed, so they instead chose to discount the new mayor's fidelity to the Republican party. The *Tribune*'s writing on police indicates how deeply involved the institution was in mid-nineteenth-century party politics, presenting the officers as pawns in a larger struggle rather than as an agency tasked with neutrally upholding the law.

Beyond arguing that former Confederate policemen needed to be discharged by Mayor Heath, the *Tribune* also wrote about who should replace them. In particular, the editors highlighted that African American men both had a right to become police officers and that there was merit in appointing them. To this end, the *Tribune* deployed a wide argumentative array, engaging in an activist role by trying to advance the cause of freedpeople politically. They endeavored to convince their audience of the virtue in hiring African American policemen and focused on doing so through reasoned argument. This is particularly noticeable in an article that asked: "What good and solid objection can be made to the appointment of colored officers?"²⁴³ Here, the paper systematically presented the opposition's arguments, before skillfully refuting them. Perhaps the particular emphasis of appealing to the audience's reason, rather than presenting an emotional or moralistic case, was specifically chosen to convince readers who were not favorable to seeing black men patrol the streets of New Orleans. Abbott argues that editors, "[b]y stressing their moderation and civility [...] hoped to win a hearing for their views,"²⁴⁴ which may also be the reason why the *Tribune* chose this particular style to argue for African American policemen.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Abbott, *For Free Press and Equal Rights*, 100.

One of the *Tribune*'s arguments stressed that African Americans had "legitimate rights" which were "being overlooked as they were under the regime of slavery."²⁴⁵ This allegation may sound bitter but also pointedly reminded readers of what was at stake during Reconstruction. As part of the "legitimate rights" being ignored in connection with policing, the refusal to hire African American men would "simply [be] a systematic perpetuation of the distinction between races and colors."²⁴⁶ Here, the *Tribune* stressed their endorsement of fairness and colorblindness, a defining feature of the Reconstruction black press according to Haskins.²⁴⁷ Nonetheless, the same article also argued on racial terms that because the African American community had "sufficient proportion" they were entitled to "their share of representation."²⁴⁸ It seems likely that the *Tribune* adopted these different arguments to convince a range of readers. Although not entirely contradictory, it is nonetheless of note that in the first article the editors argue that there should be no distinction based on race, but in the other that race should be an important criterion for hiring to ensure that appointments are commensurate to New Orleans' demographic composition. Perhaps the former argument was meant to attract white support by emphasizing "racial harmony," which Abbott argues black press editors often pursued,²⁴⁹ while the latter more directly spoke to the African American readership which was hoping to see themselves represented, or perhaps even wanted a position on the police themselves. Nonetheless, the *Tribune* more frequently argued for the right of representation, later even writing that it was their task "to take steps to secure in future a fair share of preferment to the men of African descent"²⁵⁰ in police hiring practices. The "legitimate rights" the *Tribune* was asking for were, therefore, the right to representation based on proportion.

For the *New Orleans Tribune*, the right to representation on the police force was closely tied to the franchise. The "sufficient proportion"²⁵¹ which qualified African Americans came from their share of the voting population, the *Tribune* wrote, not their population as such. Thus, the right to representation was not one qua their residence but exclusionary, given that the representation thus precluded both women and children, and also foreign residents who could not vote. Again, as was the case with gendered hiring practices, the *Tribune*'s authors displayed

²⁴⁵ "No Colored Man Appointed," *New Orleans Tribune*, May 10, 1867.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ Haskins, "Rhetorical Vision of Equality," 119.

²⁴⁸ "No Colored Man Appointed," *New Orleans Tribune*, May 10, 1867.

²⁴⁹ Abbott, *For Free Press and Equal Rights*, 45–46.

²⁵⁰ "Of What Guaranty is a Name," *New Orleans Tribune*, May 14, 1867.

²⁵¹ "No Colored Man Appointed," *New Orleans Tribune*, May 10, 1867.

their blind spot concerning women. Women simply did not appear in anything close to an equal position in the newspaper, suggesting that the editors did not consciously avoid gendered arguments but were not even cognizant that these could have been made. The franchise did not just legitimize African American policemen, but voting was also argued to be the method with which these appointments could be achieved. In an assertive tone, the *Tribune* wrote that “one half and even more of the voting population of the State [...] will not allow themselves to be cheated of their legitimate due.”²⁵² This can even be understood as a warning, as the editors emphasized the immense strength that African Americans could hold if they voted as a bloc. Perhaps they were specifically trying to persuade those readers who held influence in the Republican Party and who might have understood the implicit threat. How they would ensure that they would not “be cheated” was left unsaid, but stressing the electoral might of African Americans is likely to have been noticed by the intended targets. Here, rather than advancing the Republican Party’s cause, which Carl Osthaus claims was one of the Southern black press’s goals,²⁵³ the *Tribune* participated in the party’s factionalism. The article is not a warning to the party as such but to the Union Republicans, a more conservative faction that focused on white voters,²⁵⁴ who the *Tribune* claimed were the reason that no African Americans were “appointed on the police, but class-policemen were appointed—all white.”²⁵⁵ Given that the *Tribune* survived only thanks to Republican Party patronage, it is surprising that they would so openly challenge a party faction. Nonetheless, this is an instance where the editors’ agency shines through the newspaper page, as they decided that their mission of “pressing forward for political equality and progress”²⁵⁶ was worth risking a split with their benefactors. For the *Tribune*, the newly won right to representation on the police force was thus important enough to endanger the Southern Republican coalition they were at other times helping to build, suggesting that rather than being staunch partisans, the editors delicately negotiated their position to the benefit of African Americans, acting both as newspapermen but also as politicians.

That African Americans had fought in the Civil War was another argument that was crucial for the *Tribune* in persuading their readers about the right to black policemen. An article outlining their case highlighted that black and white men had “fought the same enemy on the same

²⁵² “Where the Difference Lies,” *New Orleans Tribune*, May 11, 1867.

²⁵³ Osthaus, *Partisans of the Southern Press*, 208.

²⁵⁴ Michael Perman, *The Road to Redemption: Southern Politics, 1869–1879* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 32.

²⁵⁵ “Where the Difference Lies,” *New Orleans Tribune*, May 11, 1867.

²⁵⁶ Davis, “Louisiana,” 156–57.

battle-field,” and further reiterated that the men had “served together under the same national flag.”²⁵⁷ It is not surprising that military service was one of the argumentative avenues pursued by the *Tribune*, given the immense importance that service in the US Colored Troops had for the formerly enslaved. As Justin Nystrom points out, “for the first time in their lives [...] these men existed as men [...] [a]n important door had been opened.”²⁵⁸ The *Tribune* was making sure that this door remained open, stressing the crucial role African American soldiers had performed by pointing out that Louisiana had been represented by over twenty-one thousand black soldiers, but only four thousand whites.²⁵⁹ Thus, the paper argued, black men should be policing because “[i]t is said that soldiers who fought for the Union must rule.”²⁶⁰ Another article made the same case, emphasizing that although “[w]e hear a great deal about ‘Union soldiers,’ and the propriety of placing them in office”²⁶¹ this was not being done for all soldiers equally, leading the paper to ask if the rights of black soldiers should “be set aside? Are not their claims as good and as respectable as those of the white soldiers?”²⁶² This method in particular seems to be addressing white Unionists as potential allies for the *Tribune*’s cause by citing them directly in the rhetorical questions. Furthermore, the paper perhaps chose to emphasize military service not just because they believed it to be important, but because throughout the Civil War some white Northerners’ minds changed precisely when they “fought the same enemy on the same battle-field.”²⁶³ Invoking military service was a strategy with which the *Tribune* could try to influence white readers who believed that fighting in the Civil War had proven the manliness, and even the humanness, of African Americans.

A further argument advanced by the *Tribune* was that African Americans should be appointed because their loyalty to the Union had been proven and was assured, which could not be said of white men. Because Mayor Heath had not replaced the old policemen, the “old spirit” of the force “survived,”²⁶⁴ the newspaper bemoaned. As the *Tribune* had spent many months attacking Monroe’s police for being “rebel” and eliciting pro-Confederate sympathies, it was implied that this was the spirit that the police was still demonstrating. Strikingly, loyalty was not just a Southern problem, as the San Francisco *Elevator* complained that “late officers in the

²⁵⁷ “No Colored Man Appointed,” *New Orleans Tribune*, May 10, 1867.

²⁵⁸ Nystrom, *New Orleans after the Civil War*, 33.

²⁵⁹ “Where the Difference Lies,” *New Orleans Tribune*, May 11, 1867.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁶¹ “No Colored Man Appointed,” *New Orleans Tribune*, May 10, 1867.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Confederate army, with the smell of treason still reeking in their garments,”²⁶⁵ were being appointed to the force. Those white men who had fought in the South had thus disqualified themselves for police service, as opposed to African Americans.

Black military service in the Union army was again stressed: “In case loyal white men could not be found,” the *Tribune* wrote, “there were colored men enough, true to the Republic who had served in the national armies, to make up the entire police force of the city.”²⁶⁶ Fighting for the Union was thus evidence for fidelity to the federal government. Moreover, the paper explained that it was precisely the marginalized status of African Americans in the South that compelled them to be loyal to the Union. Again, the paper reinforced their argument by creating a juxtaposition between black men and whites. On the one hand, a white man could not be loyal because he “cannot move but among rebels. His business and family relations are among rebels; he lives among them; he is with them from morning to night.”²⁶⁷ The paper displayed an insightful understanding of the pressures faced by white Southerners, while also advancing its cause through a reasoned argument. It is possible that white readers would have agreed with this claim given that it was indeed onerous to move within Southern society as a Unionist. This peer pressure was precisely the reason why white men could not be sufficiently trusted, argued the *Tribune*. On the other hand, black men were decidedly loyal because they were marginalized and thus would “not be bound by such ties [...]. Rebel influence cannot reach [them].”²⁶⁸ Perhaps this argument was specifically targeted at Republican politicians, as they may have been worried about turncoats in the police force, and thus the *Tribune* presented a persuasive case for why they could trust African American men more. An earlier article outlining the condition of the Republican Party in Louisiana had similarly argued made this point, arguing that “[l]oyalty does not dwell in the white population of the South—taken as a mass,” while in contrast, “loyalty lives in the hearts of the colored men.”²⁶⁹ Depending on their aim, the *Tribune*’s writers thus shifted the style in which they wrote, and loyalty was one argument they made to convince their readers of the exigency of African American policemen.

The *Tribune* clearly expressed their view that African Americans had a right to be on the police and adamantly demanded to see this right observed in practice. At the beginning of the article outlining their arguments, the *Tribune* stressed the point: “We are told that colored men

²⁶⁵ “What We Complain Of,” *The Elevator*, February 21, 1874.

²⁶⁶ “The Monroe Police,” *New Orleans Tribune*, October 26, 1867.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁹ “The Rising Party of Louisiana,” *New Orleans Tribune*, April 2, 1865.

are eligible to office, but WE SEE that none are selected.”²⁷⁰ The typographic device of writing in all capital letters was rarely used by the *Tribune*, thus making this even more striking to the reader and emphasizing the authors’ frustration. The article repeatedly stressed that the writers found the discrepancy between “principle” and “practice” unacceptable, asking in a somewhat bitter tone: “What is a right unless we enjoy it?”²⁷¹ But this was not a rhetorical question, as the article goes on to explain that an unenjoyed right “is worse than the frank denial of said right; for we are supposed to have been granted something, when, practically, we have received nothing.”²⁷² Thus, in their typically forceful tone, the *Tribune* made their desire to see African American policemen unmistakable.

The target for the *Tribune*’s demands to see the rights of freedpeople practically fulfilled was the Republican Party, which, the paper argued, was acting too slowly and was insincere in its support of African Americans. At times, this disapproval was only implicitly directed at the party, as in an article on “The Colored People and Their Friends,” which deplored that when the writers had asked “that colored men obtain their share in appointment [...] on the city police” they “were once more told that it was too soon.”²⁷³ Given that a Republican was mayor at the time, it is implied that the official responding to the plea must have been Republican too. Perhaps the editors were vague on purpose in order to not anger party leaders by directly attacking them. Alternatively, because Mayor Heath had just been elected, the *Tribune* may have not yet become frustrated enough to openly target him, instead testing to see if the Republicans could be nudged through indirect criticism toward acting in the freedpeople’s favor. Nonetheless, the objection would have been clearly understood by those addressed, and the newspaper’s demand was clear: “Our true friends are those who actually do something to our benefit,” not those who “promise a great deal and always find it is ‘too soon’ to act [...]. We want facts.”²⁷⁴

It seems that the *Tribune* quickly soured on the new Republican administration, as within two months of Heath’s election they progressed to openly naming the party as the target of their denunciations. Again, the paper presented opposing sides, noting which one they favored. “The Radicals,” were supported by the paper, as they supposedly “want to found a true and practical equality.” The proof for this was that “they stand ready to appoint” freedmen “to office.”²⁷⁵ In

²⁷⁰ “No Colored Man Appointed,” *New Orleans Tribune*, May 10, 1867.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

²⁷² *Ibid.*

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁴ “The Colored People and Their Friends,” *New Orleans Tribune*, April 4, 1867.

²⁷⁵ “Where the Difference Lies,” *New Orleans Tribune*, May 11, 1867.

contrast stood “the Ben Butler clubs and the Union party” because they “acknowledge that colored men have rights but at the same time prevent them from practically enjoying these rights.”²⁷⁶ The Union Party was a Republican faction that moved away from radicalism in an attempt to gain the votes of white men.²⁷⁷ Thus, in order to achieve the goal of African American policemen, the *Tribune* was willing to directly involve themselves in the intra-party factionalism. Although this infighting tore at the Southern Republican party, the reason the *Tribune* participated was perhaps because by the late 1860s, with the Republicans increasingly focusing on white voters, criticizing the party was one of the few options remaining for black Southerners.²⁷⁸ However, being willing to clash openly with the party was a dangerous strategy in general because of the internal weaknesses it exposed, particularly in the case of the *Tribune*. The newspaper depended for its survival on Republican Party subsidies, paid for example for printing assembly minutes.²⁷⁹ The depth of this entanglement was in fact the reason why the paper ceased publication for most of 1868, after they broke with the party entirely and lost their funding.²⁸⁰ While raising their demands at the start of Republican rule in New Orleans, the *Tribune* was already blunt in stating that their political affiliation was conditioned on seeing the party appoint black policemen. Transparently writing from an activist position, they warned that if they would not soon see “facts—solid facts” then they would “be compelled to fight a party that intended making of our rights a dead letter.”²⁸¹

After the *Tribune* had laid out its arguments for why black policemen should be appointed, Mayor Heath indeed did so. The paper interpreted this as a win on their part, claiming: “Our efforts [...] have finally been crowned with success.”²⁸² Presidential Reconstruction had been a challenging period, but with Republicans gaining power, a more optimistic outlook could be hazarded. While the *Tribune*’s discourse on policing had principally focused on criticizing law enforcement’s overreach and defending African Americans from its abuses, the appointment of black men to the police compelled a marked shift.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Perman, *The Road to Redemption*, 32.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 38.

²⁷⁹ Stephen Vaughn, *Encyclopedia of American Journalism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008), 441–42.

²⁸⁰ Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718–1868*, 275, 277.

²⁸¹ “Where the Difference Lies,” *New Orleans Tribune*, May 11, 1867.

²⁸² *New Orleans Tribune*, May 31, 1867.

6. “Reconstruction may now be said to have fairly begun”²⁸³: African American Policemen, the *Louisianian*, and Partisan Politics

After Republicans gained control of municipal governments, they began integrating their police forces, with the first African American policemen being hired in New Orleans in 1867.²⁸⁴ For the black press, this was significant progress, the importance of which was best captured by a correspondent with the *New Orleans Tribune*, who rejoiced that “Reconstruction may now be said to have fairly begun.”²⁸⁵ This ecstatic feeling was justified for him because loyal men could “once again breathe freely and are now assured some security for life and property, in the exercise of free thought, free speech, and we hope ere long a free press.”²⁸⁶ Yet, this historic development did not blind the correspondent to the realities of the South, as the black policemen were only a “fair beginning,”²⁸⁷ embodying the “guarded optimism”²⁸⁸ that historians have argued the black press often exhibited. The shift in power towards a more radical Reconstruction engendered a shift in the discourse as the newspapers responded to a widening of potential progress, which included the appointment of black policemen.

The discourse on black policemen supports Rousey’s claim that the officers “were a source of pride and dignity” for African Americans.²⁸⁹ Reporting on a review of the force by the mayor and the chief of police, the *Tribune* noted that, in general, the corps “presented a good appearance.” However, they singled out the black policemen, eleven in total, because these “looked splendidly.”²⁹⁰ Simply seeing black men in uniform was thus a celebratory moment, as it had been with soldiers during the war.²⁹¹ The significance of the black policemen is also evident in the Washington, D.C., *New Era*’s reporting,²⁹² which detailed that Charles Sumner’s casket was carried by “six colored policemen.”²⁹³ The paper also stressed that black officers were representatives of the wider community because, if one of the men were to “fill his position acceptably, it [would] not only reflect credit upon himself, but also brings it upon his people.”²⁹⁴ The

²⁸³ “Letter from Texas,” *New Orleans Tribune*, June 21, 1867.

²⁸⁴ Rousey, *Policing the Southern City*, 7.

²⁸⁵ “Letter from Texas,” *New Orleans Tribune*, June 21, 1867.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁸ Pride and Wilson II, *History of the Black Press*, 88.

²⁸⁹ Rousey, “Black Policemen in New Orleans During Reconstruction,” 243.

²⁹⁰ “Local Intelligence,” *New Orleans Tribune*, June 11, 1867.

²⁹¹ Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 27.

²⁹² Originally named *New National Era*, the newspaper changed its name to *New Era* in mid-1871.

²⁹³ “Charles Sumner: Mourning in Washington,” *New National Era*, March 19, 1874.

²⁹⁴ “Letter from Mississippi,” *New National Era*, March 19, 1873.

announcements of African American appointments to the police were not only celebrations but can also be understood as a way to inspire black readers, which Suggs argues the black press pursued “by publicizing the achievements of individuals who [had] risen from their ranks.”²⁹⁵ Thus, the newspapers wrote of the officers in glorifying terms, highlighting their personal virtues.

Much of the praise directed at black policemen was gendered, highlighting that the black press considered them paragons of manhood. Craig Taylor explains that mid-nineteenth-century manhood was torn between “two conflicting ideals: the Christian gentleman, who was sober, industrious, and self-restrained; and the martial man, who was aggressive, honorable, self-interested, and if necessary, violent.”²⁹⁶ However, the black press seems not to have maintained this dichotomy, lauding officers in terms that fit both categories. On the one hand, policemen were said to possess gentlemanly attributes, such as honesty and trustworthiness,²⁹⁷ charitableness,²⁹⁸ and integrity.²⁹⁹ On the other hand, the officers were also exemplary martial men, triumphing over “strong opposition,”³⁰⁰ showing “vigilance,”³⁰¹ and braving a job that was “onerous and often dangerous.”³⁰² Indeed, some of the officers possessed virtues from both categories.³⁰³ Thus, rather than writing of conflicting masculinities, the black press celebrated policemen as champions of nineteenth-century male ideals. This suggests that perhaps the conflict described by Taylor was not that strong, at least from the black press’s perspective, or that policemen were exemplars precisely because they were able to synthesize both models. Like New Orleans police chief Badger, who the *Louisianan* claimed showed both “great discretion” but also “firmness,”³⁰⁴ police officers were the composite of both the gentleman and martial man ideal. Portraying the policemen in this idealistic way can also be linked to nineteenth-century uplift ideology, which the editors seem to have subscribed to. This emphasized virtues such as “temperance, thrift,” and “patriarchal authority,”³⁰⁵ which the black policemen were depicted as

²⁹⁵ Suggs, “Conclusion,” 430.

²⁹⁶ Karen Taylor, “Reconstructing Men in Savannah, Georgia, 1865–1876,” in *Southern Masculinity: Perspectives on Manhood in the South since Reconstruction*, ed. Craig Thompson Friend (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 2.

²⁹⁷ “The Late Wm. H. Hagins,” *The Educator*, May 22, 1875.

²⁹⁸ “The Oliver Case,” *Semi-Weekly Louisianian*, September 28, 1871.

²⁹⁹ “Hon. Andrew Dumont,” *Weekly Louisianian*, May 2, 1874.

³⁰⁰ “The Late Wm. H. Hagins,” *The Educator*, May 22, 1875.

³⁰¹ “Chief Badger,” *Weekly Louisianian*, May 16, 1874.

³⁰² “The Police,” *Weekly Louisianian*, September 29, 1877.

³⁰³ “The Late Wm. H. Hagins,” *The Educator*, May 22, 1875.

³⁰⁴ “Chief Badger,” *Weekly Louisianian*, May 16, 1874.

³⁰⁵ Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 2.

possessing. Thus, the press constructed figures to be emulated by their readership, demonstrating that the newspapers also pursued a social function in their reporting on black policemen, attempting to shape the black community in their image.³⁰⁶ Moreover, the press's strategy of highlighting how "splendidly"³⁰⁷ the policemen looked on review suggests these displays were part of the "public performance" necessary to reinforce masculinity.³⁰⁸

In the *Tribune's* celebrations of African Americans being appointed to the police they composed a striking discursive formation. Rather than using a racialized description for the men, the newspaper wrote that the police officers were "newly enfranchised citizens."³⁰⁹ This term was a response to the passage of the Reconstruction Acts, granting citizenship and the franchise to African Americans,³¹⁰ and demonstrates how, for the *Tribune*, these two rights were intertwined with the hiring of black policemen. This is particularly evident from the frequency of its usage in 1867 and early 1868. It is not surprising that the *Tribune* highlighted the newly won voting rights of African Americans, given that the paper had "headed a campaign [...] dedicated to universal suffrage" and was the official organ of the National Equal Rights League, "a civil rights federation organized to petition Congress for unqualified black voting rights throughout the nation."³¹¹ The paper wrote transparently about this mission, celebrating their efforts after the passage of the first Reconstruction Acts.³¹² The writers further elucidated their view that black policemen had only become possible once their voting rights and citizenship had been codified in the law, hence the discursive formation frequently used by the *Tribune*.

Writing of "newly enfranchised citizens" is striking in that the phrase is a non-racialized description. Later black press papers instead used the term "colored policemen," particularly in the 1880s.³¹³ Indeed, later in 1867 the *Tribune* itself wrote of "Colored Citizens on the Police in Mobile,"³¹⁴ using an interesting admixture of both a racialized term and one highlighting the

³⁰⁶ Pride and Wilson II, *History of the Black Press*, 78; Gilles Vandal, "Black Utopia in Early Reconstruction New Orleans: The People's Bakery as a Case-Study," *Louisiana History* 38, no. 4 (Autumn 1997): 441.

³⁰⁷ "Local Intelligence," *New Orleans Tribune*, June 11, 1867.

³⁰⁸ Craig Thompson Friend, "From Southern Manhood to Southern Masculinities: An Introduction," in *Southern Masculinity: Perspectives on Manhood in the South since Reconstruction*, ed. Craig Thompson Friend (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009), x.

³⁰⁹ "Local Intelligence," *New Orleans Tribune*, May 28, 1867; "Political," *New Orleans Tribune*, May 29, 1867; *New Orleans Tribune*, May 31, 1867; "Local Intelligence," *New Orleans Tribune*, June 2, 1867; "Letter from Texas," *New Orleans Tribune*, June 21, 1867; "Local Intelligence," *New Orleans Tribune*, July 23, 1867.

³¹⁰ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 271–91.

³¹¹ Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718–1868*, 255–56.

³¹² "Do Not Give Up the Ship," *New Orleans Tribune*, May 15, 1867.

³¹³ See, for example, *North Carolina Republican*, November 12, 1880; *The Bee*, May 14, 1883; "Atlantic City," *State Journal*, July 12, 1884; "The Colored Patrolmen," *Freeman*, March 16, 1889.

³¹⁴ "Colored Citizens on the Police in Mobile," *New Orleans Tribune*, June 3, 1867.

emancipatory progress that had been made. Perhaps writing “newly enfranchised citizens” was a matter of novelty, as the *Tribune* used the phrase shortly after the franchise and citizenship had been gained and it would not have made sense to use the phrase a decade later. However, avoiding the racialized terms is perhaps also suggestive of the hopeful feeling the Reconstruction Acts inspired in the *Tribune*’s staff, as these rights were pointing towards a more equal society becoming reality. Furthermore, the discursive formation, closely intertwining the police with voting and citizenship, suggests that the *Tribune* saw black policemen as the actualization of the theoretical rights, in particular as the phrase was used almost exclusively to describe black policemen, not freedpeople in general.³¹⁵ Some historians, Heather Cox Richardson claims, have interpreted Reconstruction as “the Era of Citizenship, when Americans defined who would be citizens and what citizenship meant.”³¹⁶ That the black policemen were emphatically named “newly enfranchised citizens” strongly suggests that for the *Tribune* citizenship entailed the right to serve on the police, and having black policemen was proof that African Americans were citizens. This reciprocal relationship between police and civil rights emphasizes how important the breakthrough of black policemen was.

On the one hand, the *Tribune* understood the strength of the African American vote as the reason why black policemen should be appointed and demanded that “three-fourths of the qualified voters” not be “deprived of their share of representation on the police force.”³¹⁷ On the other hand, the vote was also the instrument with which to ensure that the right policemen would be hired, although here the *Tribune* argued in purposefully equalitarian terms, rather than highlighting that black men should be hired. “The vote is but an instrument,” they explained; it is “the means to reach the composition of juries [...] the organization of the militia and the police force, in such a manner that the interest of all races can be represented and protected.”³¹⁸ The paper also printed a speech by a black delegate to a Georgia Reconstruction meeting, lauding it for being the “speech of the day,” which argued that by voting “right” there would no longer be “any more brutal policemen. The offices should be filled by both white and colored men, who were capable of serving with honor.”³¹⁹ These examples demonstrate how closely intertwined the police was with suffrage in the view of the *Tribune*, which understood the vote as both the

³¹⁵ *New Orleans Tribune*, April 23, 1867; “Letter from Texas,” *New Orleans Tribune*, May 19, 1867.

³¹⁶ Heather Cox Richardson, “North and West of Reconstruction,” in *Reconstructions: New Perspectives on the Postbellum United States*, ed. Thomas J. Brown (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 69.

³¹⁷ “No Colored Man Appointed,” *New Orleans Tribune*, May 10, 1867.

³¹⁸ “The Colored Vote Master of the Election,” *New Orleans Tribune*, May 12, 1867.

³¹⁹ “Georgia: The Great Reconstruction Meeting in Savannah,” *New Orleans Tribune*, April 13, 1867.

reason for hiring black policemen and the way to ensure that these policemen would be virtuous and protect the rights of all.

When the black press reported on the appointment of African Americans to the police, the articles often focused on extolling the virtues of the individuals named. It is somewhat surprising that the officers were often personally named, such as when the *New Orleans Tribune*, citing the *Mobile Evening Times*, printed the names of “five freedmen” who had become officers in the Alabaman port city.³²⁰ It is unclear why the five men were individually named by the *Tribune*; perhaps the paper assumed that New Orleanian readers would be acquainted with them given the closeness of the two cities’ black communities. However, Robert H. Isabelle being named in reporting on his appointment to “corporal in the Fourth District police”³²¹ is more understandable, given that he was a prominent member of New Orleans’ social and political spheres.³²² African American sheriffs were also singled out, and their characters were of particular importance. For example, William M’Cary’s election to Adams county sheriff celebrated him for his “exceedingly dignified and aristocratic” character.³²³ Suggs argues that this reporting, emphasizing the individual attainments of black men throughout the South, is part of the black press’s purpose, as it was meant “to inspire its readers to nobler things and higher attainments by publicizing the achievements of individuals who have risen from their ranks.”³²⁴ Thus broadcasting the appointments of these black policemen was not just proof that progress was attainable, but also a way to show readers exemplary men whom they could aspire to emulate, which is why the men’s character was focused on. Moreover, that individuals were singled out also supports claims that mid-nineteenth-century policing was still focused on the individual rather than the institution, in what Rousey says was a “personal, rather than formal style” of policing.³²⁵ Because the force had not yet become professionalized, and thus bureaucratized and standardized to a certain extent, the individual policemen had to “maintain order by their own examples of personal decorum” and gain “public approval” by doing so.³²⁶ In their reporting, the black press demonstrated that they understood the police in this individualized fashion, spotlighting individual officers’ virtues.

³²⁰ “Colored Citizens on the Police in Mobile,” *New Orleans Tribune*, July 3, 1867.

³²¹ “Freedom vs. Outrages,” *New Orleans Tribune*, June 15, 1867.

³²² Vincent, *Black Legislators in Louisiana during Reconstruction*, 8, 55.

³²³ “Letter from Mississippi,” *New National Era*, March 19, 1873.

³²⁴ Suggs, “Conclusion,” 430.

³²⁵ Rousey, “Black Policemen in New Orleans During Reconstruction,” 243.

³²⁶ Johnson, *Policing the Urban Underworld*, 93.

The significance of African American men being appointed to the police force is particularly noticeable in the cross-regional reporting on them by the black press. The *New Orleans Tribune*, for example, reported on the employment of five “freedmen” to the Mobile police.³²⁷ This coverage beyond the immediate vicinity of the newspaper’s headquarters demonstrates that the editors understood their community of readers to be ultimately national in scope, and the readers perhaps did so too.³²⁸ Moreover, through this reporting they were also delineating and reinforcing the community’s breadth, shaping the African American diaspora into an “imagined community,” to adopt Benedict Anderson’s concept.³²⁹ As Anderson explains, the community was imagined because most members “will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”³³⁰ Reporting on black men becoming police officers and thus informing readers of each other’s circumstances was one way this communion was reinforced. The format of the black press was perhaps particularly suited to creating this feeling of community, as it reported on minutiae, such as the hiring of a handful of black policemen from other parts of the country.³³¹ The most geographically extreme example of reporting across the United States was when the San Francisco *Elevator* wrote about the appointment of twenty-five black men to the New York City police,³³² demonstrating that the entire nation was considered the diaspora’s scope. One paper in particular, Frederick Douglass’s *New Era*, also showed great interest in international affairs related to policing, contrasting the situation abroad to that in America. The paper’s examination of the young Dominican Republic’s practices was perhaps motivated by similarities between it and the reconstructing South, both being former slave societies that were trying to transition to Republics. The black press was however far more interested in the nation’s western neighbor, Haiti, a country that was attempting an “experiment in self-government” by black people.³³³ Furthermore, the *New Era* also reported on Europe, explaining that the disciplinarian style of preventative policing there could not be instituted in America, as it “would seem a manifestation

³²⁷ “Transmitted to the *New Orleans Tribune*,” *New Orleans Tribune*, July 2, 1867.

³²⁸ Jeffrey D. Groves, “Introduction to Chapter 7: Periodicals and Serial Publications,” in *The Industrial Book, 1840–1880*, ed. David D. Hall, vol. 3, (Chapel Hill, NC: Published by the University of North Carolina Press in association with the American Antiquarian Society, 2007), 224.

³²⁹ See, Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2016).

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

³³¹ On the importance of newspapers in creating imagined communities, see *ibid.*, 25.

³³² *Elevator*, June 21, 1873.

³³³ See, for example, “San Domingo,” *New National Era*, April 13, 1871.

of tyranny [...] an infringement of individual liberty.”³³⁴ Perhaps the *New Era* was particularly interested in international differences in policing because it was based in the nation’s capital and thus surrounded by diplomats and foreigners. Nonetheless, these examples substantiate that, as Fagan argues was the case for the antebellum black press, “editors and their audiences understood the medium as a way to create connections between readers and listeners at local, national, and international levels.”³³⁵

A particularly illustrative case for how the black press understood the community it was cultivating is found in the San Francisco *Elevator*, which wrote that “our friend” F. G. Barbadoes was appointed to the Capitol Police in Washington, D.C.³³⁶ The fact that the policeman was named and no further information, including his race, was mentioned is striking. The name, however, is likely to have been well known by the *Elevator*’s more elite readers, as Frederick G. Barbadoes was the son of Boston abolitionist James G. Barbadoes, who had played an important role in the city’s free black community.³³⁷ Perhaps even if readers did not know Frederick, the striking surname may nonetheless have been recognizable. The *Elevator*’s editor Phillip A. Bell likely knew the Barbadoes family, given that his career started on the East Coast,³³⁸ and may have assumed that his readers did too. Whatever the reason, the *Elevator* evidently expected readers to be interested in this appointment and be acquainted with members of the black aristocracy from across the nation.³³⁹ Furthermore, as Judith Giesberg points out, the *Elevator* was instrumental to creating San Francisco’s African American community by helping the readers not just become familiar with each other but also insuring they “knew they were part of a larger civil rights community,” which is precisely what the reporting on Barbadoes’s appointment to the police accomplished.³⁴⁰ In D.C., the *Commoner* also reported on the sons of a notable abolitionist, Frederick Douglass, being appointed to the Capital Police, which is indicative of status

³³⁴ “A Word About Capital Punishment,” *New Era*, July 13, 1871. See also “Aspects and Prospect in Europe,” *New National Era*, March 30, 1871.

³³⁵ Fagan, *Chosen Nation*, 10; For the importance of the press in developing a sense of community, see also Abbott, *For Free Press and Equal Rights*, 3; Jean Folkerts, “Functions of the Reform Press,” *Journalism History* 12, no. 1 (March 1985): 22.

³³⁶ “Appointment,” *Elevator*, January 31, 1868.

³³⁷ James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North* (New York, NY: Holmes & Meier, 1979), 74, 90–91; Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1969), 22, 25.

³³⁸ Clint C. Wilson II, *Black Journalists in Paradox: Historical Perspectives and Current Dilemmas*, (New York, NY: Greenwood, 1991), 30.

³³⁹ Willard B. Gatewood, “Aristocrats of Color: The Educated Black Elite of the Post-Reconstruction Era,” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 29 (Autumn 2000): 112–18.

³⁴⁰ Judith Ann Giesberg, *Army at Home: Women and the Civil War on the Northern Home Front* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 99.

and prestige being inheritable in addition to being an important attribute for reporting.³⁴¹ Moreover, these examples suggest that the community being created by the black press was heavily concerned with elite African American families.

Although the black press was clearly interested in African American men joining the police forces of other cities across the nation, their reporting in this area, as in many others, was “a haphazard venture at best.”³⁴² The *Louisianian*’s announcement that three black sheriffs had been elected in Mississippi exemplifies this randomness, as within a week the paper had to correct the announcement and add three further sheriffs that they “did not then know of.”³⁴³ Rather than systematically covering the country’s police departments, it appears that the newspapers reported on whatever information they were able to gather. However, the reporting also highlights local idiosyncrasies in the black press’s operation. The *New Orleans Tribune*, for example, wrote numerous articles on Mobile, Alabama, including the city’s hiring of black policemen. The interest in the port city’s law enforcement probably arose because of a particular closeness felt between Mobile and New Orleans’ Afro-Creoles, who “shared a common culture” and history.³⁴⁴ Practical considerations will have also contributed to the reporting, as the *Tribune* likely had easier access to information from Mobile because the cities were connected by overnight mail boat, thus increasing the frequency with which information was exchanged between the two.³⁴⁵ Given the sparsity of information on the Reconstruction-period black press, it is sometimes difficult to differentiate between agency and contingency in reporting such as this. A further challenge the mid-nineteenth-century press poses is that a haphazard style of reporting resulted in convoluted tangles of reprinting. For example, the *Louisianian* wrote that “The Arkansas Weekly Republican [...] contains the information that President Grant reviewed the procession of zouave and colored battalions, police and fire departments.”³⁴⁶ It is unclear if the police and fire departments also featured black men and where Grant had seen these forces. Nonetheless, this article points to the importance that black men serving in any capacity could have, as this snippet of information must have undergone a convoluted journey from Arkansas to New Orleans before being published. Although the black press’s reporting on African

³⁴¹ *Commoner*, September 4, 1875; *Commoner*, November 20, 1875. The appointment of these sons of prominent African American abolitionists is an interesting development which suggests that further research into the Capitol Police during the Reconstruction era could be promising.

³⁴² Osthaus, *Partisans of the Southern Press*, 209.

³⁴³ *Semi-Weekly Louisianian*, November 19, 1871; *Semi-Weekly Louisianian*, November 26, 1871.

³⁴⁴ Ross, *Great Kidnapping Case*, 89.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

³⁴⁶ *Semi-Weekly Louisianian*, October 1, 1871.

American police was often haphazard, the efforts undertaken evince the importance of the subject and that editors endeavored to collect meaningful information for their readers.

The black press's cross-regional reporting on African American policemen was not just about delineating the breadth of their community, but also part of their activist inclinations. Often, the papers spotlighted the progress other cities made to present an example that should be emulated. The *New Orleans Tribune* made this explicit. After thirty black policemen were hired in Mobile Alabama, they wrote: "We hope that when a change will take place here it will be similar to that of our sister city."³⁴⁷ This also echoes a function of the antebellum abolitionist press, which Fagan claims "could offer hope and inspiration to all those engaged in this larger cause" of black freedom.³⁴⁸ The newspapers pointed to the African American policemen in order to emphasize that these were desirable successes of black activism. The San Francisco *Elevator* even looked across the continent and saw New York's twenty-five policemen as an "example for California."³⁴⁹ Perhaps by announcing these appointments the newspapers were even widening their reader's imaginative horizon, demonstrating that integrated police forces were not an unrealistic hope but becoming reality. Nevertheless, the articles were still very narrow in their scope, as they focused on where and when black policemen took up their jobs but not on how or why they had been appointed in the first place. The *Elevator* perhaps needed to acknowledge that New York City had a proportionately much larger African American community and thus could make a stronger case for representation on the force than San Francisco's small black populace, representing less than two percent of the city.³⁵⁰ The black press editors showed an inclination to champion the cause of black equality, yet here they concentrated more on reporting and narrating developments rather than working toward being fully activist publications. Furthermore, developments in other cities could also serve as counter-examples, as when several years later, in 1871, the *Louisianian* reported on Mobile firing its black policemen. Although there is no direct editorial comment by the *Louisianian*, it is still clear that Mobile electing a Democrat should serve as a warning to New Orleans, as the change in power had made the "political status" look "very gloomy indeed," the paper wrote.³⁵¹ Thus, like the antebellum abolitionist press outlined by Fagan, the Reconstruction-era black press looked to integrated police forces across the United States to "connect readers to a community but also to

³⁴⁷ "The Police of Mobile," *New Orleans Tribune*, April 4, 1867.

³⁴⁸ Fagan, *Chosen Nation*, 2.

³⁴⁹ *Elevator*, June 21, 1873.

³⁵⁰ Giesberg, *Army at Home*, 98.

³⁵¹ "For the *Louisianian*," *Semi-Weekly Louisianian*, June 15, 1871.

inspire members of that community,”³⁵² and also to warn them when circumstances were no longer in favor of black equality.

The patronage system was a fundamental part of mid-nineteenth-century politics. Winning an election meant the power to hand out lucrative civil service positions, which rewarded loyalty and service to party leaders, as well as nurturing close ties between the party and its supporters by financially intertwining the two.³⁵³ Police appointments were among the jobs victors of municipal elections could hand out to their supporters and, particularly because of the swelling size of police departments after the Civil War, they were “one of the largest sources of patronage available.”³⁵⁴ Furthermore, these positions were well-paid and thus popular.³⁵⁵ The New Orleans massacre underscores this importance, as the riotous police were likely motivated by the fear of losing their jobs if Republicans, through the black vote, won control of New Orleans’ patronage allocation.³⁵⁶ Michael Fitzgerald argues that the “grubby mechanics of patronage politics” in the Reconstruction era deserves closer attention, as the involvement of African Americans in these dealings is an area where their agency is particularly prominent.³⁵⁷ Indeed, once Republicans began gaining control of municipal appointments, the black press began to candidly demand that African Americans be granted their share of the patronage positions available on the police force. The comparison between how the *New Orleans Tribune*, an assertive paper which believed itself to be persuasive and powerful, dealt with this issue and the approach taken by the San Francisco *Elevator*, arguing for a tiny minority’s hopes, illustrates how editors understood and used the power available to them.

The *Tribune* was insistent that black New Orleanians were “entitled, by all rules of equity, to their share in the patronage,” which they emphasized included the police force.³⁵⁸ However, they did not focus on the pecuniary advantages to be gained but on the fact that being denied their positions on the police meant they could not wield power, and thus African Americans would continue “to be arrested, imprisoned, ill treated, and molested by police officers.”³⁵⁹

³⁵² Fagan, *Chosen Nation*, 7.

³⁵³ White, *The Republic for Which It Stands*, 254, 330.

³⁵⁴ Johnson, *Policing the Urban Underworld*, 113.

³⁵⁵ Walker, *Critical History of Police Reform*, 9.

³⁵⁶ Gilles Vandal, “The Origins of the New Orleans Riot of 1866, Revisited,” *Louisiana History* 22, no. 2 (Spring 1981): 143.

³⁵⁷ Michael W. Fitzgerald, “Reconstruction Politics and the Politics of Reconstruction,” in *Reconstructions: New Perspectives on the Postbellum United States*, ed. Thomas J. Brown (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 113.

³⁵⁸ “No Colored Man Appointed,” *New Orleans Tribune*, May 10, 1867.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

Although the *Tribune* used the language of patronage, they were worried about more than just salaries. They saw “hundreds of indirect advantages that the governing class draws from their position in the government.”³⁶⁰ The *Elevator* also demanded that African Americans be given their fair share in these, writing that “claims of all classes of citizens should be recognized in the distribution of official patronage.”³⁶¹ Yet while the *Tribune* had been able to point to the potential electoral power of a black voting bloc, the *Elevator* could only appeal to the Republican Party’s values, making clear that African Americans’ “loyalty to the government, and fealty to the Republican principle [should] be rewarded.”³⁶² In comparison to the *Tribune*’s often assertive tone, the *Elevator* sounded disheartened, acknowledging that their demands had neither force nor threat: “Under all these circumstance,” they wrote, “we are Republicans and intend to remain as such.”³⁶³ Their political impotence was even such that they added a quasi-apology to the article outlining their grievances, conceding that in the future they would “refrain from exposing and complaining of the ingratitude of the party.”³⁶⁴ In these articles, both the *Tribune*’s and the *Elevator*’s staffs demonstrate an acute awareness of their position and capacity to influence municipal politics. Moreover, their articles indicate a willingness to exploit this agency to its fullest. The *Tribune*, buoyed by the threat of an electoral bloc they believed could be influenced through their newspaper, forcefully demanded patronage positions on the police. In contrast, the *Elevator*, accepting that with less than two percent of San Francisco’s population being black³⁶⁵ they wielded little power to caution the Republicans and had no other political home,³⁶⁶ tried the best they could. The paper appealed to the party’s principles, yet, should this fail, ensured that “black memory had a lasting public place,”³⁶⁷ which Gardner claims was one of the black press’s aims. “[M]ore in sorrow than in anger,” the *Elevator* was voicing their hopes “simply to let it be known here and in Washington that we have just cause of complaint.”³⁶⁸ Although no African American men were appointed to San Francisco’s police force during Reconstruction, the *Elevator*’s voice can still be heard today and their entreaty serves as a reminder

³⁶⁰ “The Colored Vote Master of the Election,” *New Orleans Tribune*, May 12, 1867.

³⁶¹ “What We Complain Of,” *Elevator*, February 21, 1874.

³⁶² *Ibid.*

³⁶³ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁵ Giesberg, *Army at Home*, 98.

³⁶⁶ Pride and Wilson II, *History of the Black Press*, 85.

³⁶⁷ Gardner, “Early African American Print Culture,” 84.

³⁶⁸ “What We Complain Of,” *Elevator*, February 21, 1874.

that the era was one of hope for African Americans throughout the country, not just in the South, where meaningful progress was achieved due to electoral and demographic majorities.

As the black press was closely tied to the Republican Party, it is no surprise that once the party started gaining power in the South the press's discourse on policing also began to change. Rather than being an independent fourth power, the newspapers were doubly hitched to the party. Indirectly, because they were the only hope African Americans had in the South, given that the Democrats remained in many ways the party of slave power and actively fought to restrict, rather than expand, the rights of freedpeople.³⁶⁹ Directly the black press was tied to the Republicans because the papers often relied on either government or party subsidies for survival.³⁷⁰ While the *New Orleans Tribune* was willing to risk its survival by clashing with the party over the issue of appointing black men to the police force, the same cannot be said for the *Louisianian*. Its discourse on the police differs strikingly from the *Tribune*'s, to a large extent because it was so closely tied to the Republicans and because, by the time the *Louisianian* started publication, the party was no longer a minority opposition in Louisiana but in control of all levels of government. This relationship to power is an anomaly for the early black press. Timothy Shortell argues that it was precisely the marginalized status of African Americans that bred black radicalism before the Civil War.³⁷¹ During Radical Reconstruction, however, the black press was heavily invested in protecting the political status quo, strongly influencing their discourse on the police.

P. B. S. Pinchback was a prominent Louisiana politician whose career in the upper echelons of the state Republican Party reached its pinnacle when he became the nation's first African American governor in 1872, albeit only for one month as the acting replacement of ousted Governor Henry Warmoth.³⁷² Pinchback's *Louisianian* was one of the state party's loudest organs and claimed an unequivocal editorial position: "Republican at all times, and under all circumstances."³⁷³ Unsurprisingly, this stance was also evinced in the paper's position vis-à-vis the police, whose actions were not scrutinized but instead regularly defended. For example, the *Louisianian* declared that those "who claim that the police intimidate them [...] are the

³⁶⁹ Pride and Wilson II, *History of the Black Press*, 85.

³⁷⁰ Vaughn, *Encyclopedia of American Journalism*, 441.

³⁷¹ Shortell, "The Rhetoric of Black Abolitionism: An Exploratory Analysis of Antislavery Newspapers in New York State," 80.

³⁷² Walter G. Cowan and Jack B. McGuire, *Louisiana Governors: Rulers, Rascals, and Reformers* (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 107.

³⁷³ For example, see the first issue after Pinchback's purchase of the paper, December 12, 1870.

malefactors,”³⁷⁴ showing a resolute support of the police while broadly disregarding what could have been justified criticism. This is a striking contrast to the days when Democrat-controlled municipal law enforcement was excoriated in the pages of the *New Orleans Tribune*. This volte-face of the discourse on policing between the two papers occurred because municipal power had changed hands, but also because of the *Louisianian*’s relationship to power.

Rather than just avoiding criticizing the police because it was supervised by Republican politicians, the *Louisianian* actively defended the institution. Strikingly, a vociferous defense of the police came not as a response to criticism leveled by Democrats or other adversaries the paper may have had, but from inside the Republican Party itself. The *Louisianian* frequently reacted to articles from the *National Republican*, which it felt was incorrectly reporting on the New Orleans police. This spat was fought at times with a vicious rhetoric by the *Louisianian*, which claimed that the *National Republican* attacked police officers with a “tone of perversion.”³⁷⁵ More harshly still, the *Louisianian* associated the *National Republican* with the rioters of both the 1866 New Orleans massacre and 1868 killings in St. Landry parish, Reconstruction’s deadliest incident of racial violence,³⁷⁶ because these rioters had also “demanded that the police should be removed” and had wanted “mob law [...] a law which is no law.”³⁷⁷ The police, controlled by Pinchback’s superior, Governor Warmoth, played a minor role in the greater feud between rivalling Republican factions and their corresponding newspapers. However, it is still noteworthy that the *Louisianian* attacked critics of the police with such vitriol and, frankly, insults.³⁷⁸ This tone is particularly surprising given that the Republican press supposedly endeavored to adopt “a calm and objective editorial tone that they hoped would contrast favorably with the wildly hyperbolic language” of Democratic papers.³⁷⁹ Here, the *Louisianian* instead fits in well with the “shrill and biased” tone Stephen Vaughn claims the Southern press had during Reconstruction.³⁸⁰

In contrast to the paper’s intraparty enemies, the *Louisianian* extolled the police’s virtue. They were the ones who “have kept down the mob spirit for years and with the help of a just

³⁷⁴ *Semi-Weekly Louisianian*, January 18, 1872.

³⁷⁵ *Semi-Weekly Louisianian*, July 15, 1872.

³⁷⁶ White, *The Republic for Which It Stands*, 98.

³⁷⁷ “Law and Order,” *Semi-Weekly Louisianian*, January 14, 1872.

³⁷⁸ The *Louisianian* also repeatedly referred to the *National Republican* and supporters of the Customhouse faction as “fags.” What exactly the paper was trying to express with this term is unclear, as the pejorative usage of the term is only proven to have begun in the twentieth century, well after the articles in question were published. Perhaps the *Louisianian* was using the term to deride their adversaries as “fag ends” i.e. being the butt end.

³⁷⁹ Abbott, *For Free Press and Equal Rights*, 99.

³⁸⁰ Vaughn, *Encyclopedia of American Journalism*, 441.

God will still seize and hold it—chained”³⁸¹ and they were also the ones who instill “terror” in “[t]he malefactor with his fell spirit athirst [sic] for blood.”³⁸² This is quite a contrast to how the *Tribune* had written about the police a few years earlier, calling them “blood-hounds”³⁸³ and “rebels.”³⁸⁴ The discursive shift in response to the change in power is noticeable in these statements, especially in how the *Louisianian* was unquestioning of the force. In comparison, during Democratic control of the police, the *Tribune* had still declared: “We are not given to compliments, and none are expected by the police from the *Tribune*.”³⁸⁵ The difference between the two papers is indicative of the entanglement of both journalism and law enforcement with politics and is a clear example of how discourse is shaped by power, or those who wield it. Particularly the *Louisianian*’s stance belies journalistic ideals and exemplifies that newspapers are not neutral or objective in their reporting but mostly differ only in the degree with which they make the interests underpinning their reporting transparent.

The *Louisianian* expected the police to project gentlemanly virtue and respectability, while also having the potential to intimidate their enemies. This is demonstrated in the praise given to the Metropolitan Police, a special unit under Governor Warmoth’s command, who had created it as an effort to modernize the New Orleans police force, improving hiring practices and equipping the men with new weapons and uniforms.³⁸⁶ It is somewhat surprising that Pinchback’s paper celebrated this unit given the rivalry between his and the Governor’s factions³⁸⁷ and the fact that the unit was in effect Warmoth’s “private army.”³⁸⁸ Perhaps Pinchback’s staff was able to overlook intraparty differences because of the Metropolitans’ importance, as they were crucial to the Republican Party’s survival in Louisiana.³⁸⁹ The unit’s praise points to Warmoth’s efforts being appreciated by the *Louisianian*, as they wrote that the Metropolitans were “well uniformed” and “[i]n the performance of their evolutions too, they displayed an efficiency that will bear favorable comparison with ‘regulars,’”³⁹⁰ which can be understood as praise for the efforts of modernization and professionalization. The force’s outward appearance was also of particular importance, and for the *Louisianian* the policemen were paragons of respectability,

³⁸¹ “Law and Order,” *Semi-Weekly Louisianian*, January 14, 1872.

³⁸² *Ibid.*

³⁸³ “Gen. Fullerton’s First Week’s Work,” *New Orleans Tribune*, October 28, 1865.

³⁸⁴ For a comparison see chap. 5, 28-31.

³⁸⁵ “Local Intelligence,” *New Orleans Tribune*, November 22, 1865.

³⁸⁶ Ross, *Great Kidnapping Case*, 17.

³⁸⁷ Pride and Wilson II, *History of the Black Press*, 91.

³⁸⁸ Emberton, *Beyond Redemption*, 137.

³⁸⁹ Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, 160.

³⁹⁰ “Police Review,” *Semi-Weekly Louisianian*, December 21, 1871.

with their appearance being said to be “highly creditable,” “fine looking, ablebodied,” and “neat and clean.”³⁹¹ This impression is given support by the spectators, who the paper had “no doubt [...] will feel constrained to admit that our Police Force is at once a formidable and a respectable organization.”³⁹² While respectability was important for the *Louisianian*, including the comment that the force was “formidable” suggests that their powerfulness was also crucial.

When comparing the *Louisianian*’s and other black press newspapers’ discourse on policing to that of white newspapers, a striking silence by the former is noticeable. The killing of a black policeman, John Wilson, in Portsmouth, Virginia, on November 11, 1871, by a white man highlights the contrast between the black and white press. This event was significant enough that several papers along the Eastern Coast reported on it, yet no article could be found in the black press.³⁹³ The size of Wilson’s funeral indicates that the event was a critical moment in Portsmouth and for the local black community, making the black press’s silence even more striking. Three thousand mourners, the *Daily State Journal* reported, joined the entire police force for a procession.³⁹⁴ The pallbearers even included four white men, one of whom was Portsmouth’s mayor.³⁹⁵ Moreover, the *Journal* eulogized Wilson in the highest terms, writing that he had been “one of the best, and most intelligent and efficient of the colored policemen [...] The occurrence is a most lamentable one, and is deplored on every hand by [...] everybody.”³⁹⁶ Why, then, did the black press not write about John Wilson’s killing?

Although the black press had no access to the sources available to the white press³⁹⁷—and the similarity of several articles in different white papers suggests they shared a source—it is highly unlikely that black editors would not have been aware of what had happened. The black press frequently cited, referenced, and reprinted articles from white papers, using them as a source of information that was otherwise inaccessible to black journalists.³⁹⁸ The killing was so broadly covered, including by widely read and highly influential papers such as the *New York Tribune*, that black editors must have at some point read about it.

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ See, “Excitement in Norfolk, Va.,” *New York Tribune*, November 18, 1871; “Fatal Affray in Portsmouth, Va.,” *New York Herald*, November 13, 1871. Other newspapers that reported on the killing include the *Philadelphia Inquirer* (November 13), the *Philadelphia Public Ledger* (November 13), the *Trenton State Gazette* (November 14), the *Baltimore Sun* (November 16), the *Hartford Daily Courant* (November 20), and the *New Hampshire Patriot* (November 22).

³⁹⁴ *Daily State Journal* (Alexandria, Va.), November 17, 1871.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Osthaus, *Partisans of the Southern Press*, 209.

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

The white press's coverage of the consequences of John Wilson's death suggests that black newspapers avoided the topic in anticipation of white reaction to black anger and grief. Reporting in white newspapers indicates that public displays of mourning created considerable anxiety, with white Portsmouth residents fearing African Americans could be preparing retaliation. The New York *Tribune* voiced this fear, writing that "the negroes have manifested such a state of feeling as to give rise to serious apprehension of trouble between the two races."³⁹⁹ Proof, according to the *Tribune*, were several meetings "at which resolutions of sympathy and deep regrets were passed" and a plan was struck to "call a mass meeting on the market square."⁴⁰⁰ Rather than seeing this meeting as a public display of bereavement and anger by a community justified to feel this way, the Democratic papers "became alarmed for the maintenance of peace and good order,"⁴⁰¹ or at least the *Tribune* claims this to be the case. Apparently, white Portsmouth residents even asked the mayor to ban the meeting, as it "might result in collision."⁴⁰² Avoiding the subject was perhaps meant to prevent any further deepening of the tensions and to not agitate a nervous white population. Antebellum, whites had periodically feared black uprisings, and Emancipation had only amplified these fears.⁴⁰³ It is possible that black editors wanted to avoid worsening the situation precisely to prevent bloodshed. Even the *Daily State Journal*, which had previously eulogized Wilson, noticed the tension in the city and noted that papers in the area were "expressing fears that the colored people of Portsmouth contemplated creating a disturbance."⁴⁰⁴ Perhaps the black newspapers were also protecting themselves, as they could be one of the first targets during riots,⁴⁰⁵ and reporting on distant tensions could be interpreted by whites as instigating a local black uprising. If this was the motivation for staying silent on Wilson's killing, then it was white anxieties and fears that were meaningfully constraining the discursive horizon in which the black press could operate. On the one hand, this was a political limitation, as the *Daily State Journal* claimed that there were at least some links between the killer and the Democratic Party, and his racist motivation was also suggested.⁴⁰⁶ Therefore, the black press was being constrained from also raising these allegations, or at least examining them

³⁹⁹ "Excitement in Norfolk, Va.," New York *Tribune*, November 18, 1871.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Ibid.

⁴⁰³ Stephen V Ash, *A Massacre in Memphis: The Race Riot That Shook the Nation One Year after the Civil War* (New York, NY: Hill & Wang, a division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014), 41.

⁴⁰⁴ *Daily State Journal* (Alexandria, VA), November 16, 1871.

⁴⁰⁵ Dann, *The Black Press*, 69.

⁴⁰⁶ *Daily State Journal* (Alexandria, VA), November 13, 1871.

more closely. Ultimately, the meeting was called off and the *Tribune* could report that “[e]verything remains quiet.”⁴⁰⁷ The same influences that prevented the black community from meeting en masse perhaps also constrained the black press’s reporting on the issue. White reaction prevented black mourning, both in Portsmouth itself and in the wider black press. While a white paper could celebrate the life of an African American policeman,⁴⁰⁸ the black press could not. The threat of white violence thus powerfully constrained the potential of the black community to voice even a human response to a dreadful event.

Overall, the black press wrote surprisingly little about African American policemen, given that their appointments are considered historic achievements today. Even in articles where race could be mentioned in passing this was often not done. The *Louisianian*, for example, examined “Interesting Statistical Information” including police hiring practices and promotions. Nationality or ethnicity were, however, only detailed in figures on which perpetrators were arrested.⁴⁰⁹ Furthermore, the paper frequently reported on police actions in their “Board of Police” section but did not mention the race of officers even though their full names were often published. Perhaps the *Louisianian* purposefully avoided mentioning race as a strategy for working towards a colorblind society. The paper was aware of widespread racism—this was unavoidable—but maybe the editors did not needlessly focus on race to not further deepen animosities.

Another possible reason for the silence surrounding black policemen may have been because the issue was too controversial, and newspapers did not want to kindle further tensions. How contentious issues surrounding policing could be is evident in the *Louisianian*’s emphatic denunciations of “Malignity and Falsehood” in the charges white papers had leveled at Pinchback. “He has not taken his seat as President of the Metropolitan Police Board,” the paper stressed, “and in no form nor manner whatever interfered with this body up to the present time.”⁴¹⁰ This claim is surprising given that Pinchback as lieutenant governor was also “ex officio head of the New Orleans police force.”⁴¹¹ Perhaps the paper was being cheeky in their statement, as the article was written only days after Pinchback’s appointment as lieutenant governor and thus he may not have had the time yet to interfere with the police. Nonetheless, the vehemence with which the *Louisianian* responded to a white paper’s claims strongly suggests that having a man of African descent at the head of the police was a highly contentious matter.

⁴⁰⁷ “Excitement in Norfolk, Va.,” *New York Tribune*, November 18, 1871.

⁴⁰⁸ *Daily State Journal* (Alexandria, VA), November 17, 1871.

⁴⁰⁹ “Metropolitan Police Report,” *Weekly Louisianian*, January 4, 1873.

⁴¹⁰ “Malignity and Falsehood,” *Weekly Louisianian*, December 10, 1871.

⁴¹¹ Pride and Wilson II, *History of the Black Press*, 91.

Similarly, black policemen were likely to have been just as controversial as any armed African Americans generally were in the South. African Americans in a soldier's uniform were "the manifestation of [white Southerners] worst nightmare"⁴¹² and perhaps the same was true for those wearing police uniforms. Maybe newspapers were avoiding writing about them to not raise these fears in potential white readers. Furthermore, the black newspapers may have been avoiding the issue because of its political implications; biracial policing was, after all, always "inherently political."⁴¹³ As organs of the Republican Party in the South, the papers pursued the mission of keeping together a diverse coalition. Editors' task in this sense included suppressing attention to "divisive issues,"⁴¹⁴ in particular because these would offer Democrats ample opportunities to exploit.⁴¹⁵ Although the black press did not fully shy away from political or even controversial issues, perhaps black policemen were still underreported for these reasons. Lastly, attention paid to the black press by whites was often negative attention.⁴¹⁶ Conservative papers wrote acrimoniously of black policemen, depicting them as incompetent and publicizing "even their slightest misstep."⁴¹⁷ Thus, not reporting on them at all may have been a strategy designed to avoid delivering any further ammunition for their adversaries.

Overall, the black press wrote little about African American policemen, especially concerning their daily activities, and what reporting did occur was often haphazard or uncoordinated. The silence in a case like the killing of John Wilson points to the papers being constrained by whites, if not actively then by a fear of white attention and reaction. But the lack of reporting also suggests that, as momentous as black policemen appear today, they were not the center of attention during Reconstruction. Only twelve Southern cities appointed black policemen, and this development may have been overshadowed by progress in other areas, such as the numerous African American politicians elected on all levels of government.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹² Andrew F. Lang, "Republicanism, Race, and Reconstruction: The Ethos of Military Occupation in Civil War America," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 4, no. 4 (December 2014): 565.

⁴¹³ Ross, *Great Kidnapping Case*, 212.

⁴¹⁴ Nerone, "Newspapers and the Public Sphere," 234.

⁴¹⁵ For example, in Georgia Democrats managed to convince enough white Republicans to switch sides over controversial issues, thereby gaining control of the state. See Drago, *Black Politicians and Reconstruction in Georgia*, 48–49.

⁴¹⁶ Nerone, "Newspapers and the Public Sphere," 246.

⁴¹⁷ Ross, *Great Kidnapping Case*, 38.

⁴¹⁸ For an overview of African American policemen in Southern cities, see Rousey, "Black Policemen in New Orleans During Reconstruction," 232.

7. Conclusion

During Reconstruction, the black press had a complicated and changing relationship with the police, which was reflected in the discourse. Law enforcement was in the midst of the struggle over the meaning of freedom and, as accessories to anti-black Democratic governments during Presidential Reconstruction, the officers often actively restricted the newly won rights and freedoms of African Americans in the South. Thus, the black press mostly wrote in way that made their adversarial relationship to the police clear. The *New Orleans Tribune* adopted an array of strategies in their discursive clash with the force, disparaging the officers and their actions during incidents such as the 1866 New Orleans massacre. However, the paper was also surprisingly silent about the day-to-day actions of the police, perhaps indicating that the institution was not very important or authoritative at the time, or that the class status of its editors influenced their outlook. Outside of violent clashes with the police, the *Tribune* appears to have agreed with the policing of behavior outside of middle-class mores, indicating that the newspaper was not antagonistic to the police per se.

The shift in power that inaugurated Radical Reconstruction, including Republicans gaining control of New Orleans, generated a marked shift in the discourse on policing. Rather than demonstrating hostility against the police, the *Tribune* began arguing for the necessity and rightfulness of hiring black policemen, arguing both on a partisan political basis as well as on the higher level of rights. When black officers started to be hired, the way they were written of indicates their importance. They were a source of pride and hope, while also embodying virtues such as masculinity and respectability. Especially the appointment of prominent African Americans was a focus of the black press's reporting. In part, this was how the newspapers constructed a cross-regional community out of the black diaspora. The *Louisianian's* discourse in particular illustrates the response to the shift in power. As a government-adjacent paper, it defended the police vociferously, especially the Republican-run Metropolitan police. Herein, the deeply political nature of nineteenth-century law enforcement agencies is also demonstrated. However, even during Radical Reconstruction, when the black press was closer to those in power, they were constrained in their reporting, illustrated most aptly in that the white press reported on the murder of a black policemen, while the black press did not.

Overall, this project focused on two African American-owned newspapers, the *Louisianian* and in particular the *New Orleans Tribune*. In part, this focus stems from the papers' length of publication in comparison to the rest of the Reconstruction black press, and it also reflects

their importance as leading journals of the period.⁴¹⁹ This decision also meant that the project's spotlight was on New Orleans, a city called "colorfully eccentric and idiosyncratic," which nonetheless "shared many experiences with the police force of other major U.S. cities."⁴²⁰ A widening of the scope to include white newspapers would enable further investigation into black policemen throughout the South, as other cities had also appointed numerous black men,⁴²¹ although this would mean no longer strictly looking at the black press's discourse. Unfortunately, the expectation that the black press would offer a better understanding of the daily practice of law enforcement in the South was not fulfilled.⁴²² Especially given the "'politicization' of everyday life" after Emancipation, information about encounters between policemen, both black and white, and the public appears to offer a promising route to understanding how the restructuring of society occurred from the bottom up.⁴²³

The greatest difference between the Reconstruction black press and that of other eras seems to be the exceptional relation it had to political power. For the first time in American history, African Americans were political actors who could forcefully exert the influence of their vote to effect change in their favor. This new circumstance was reflected in how the press wrote about the police, arguing for black policemen to be hired and threatening Republicans if they did not follow. Moreover, the period's hopefulness was mirrored by the newspapers, perhaps for the last time for over a century. Furthermore, the discourse on policing also reinforces the realization that the African American community cannot be understood as monolithic. It appears that editors were sometimes motivated by class concerns rather than racially inflected ones. This tendency illustrates that their belonging to an oppressed group did not immediately translate into unquestioned solidarity and that this marginalization—including from the white press—did not mean that newspapers were automatically trying to be counter-hegemonic.

The appointment of black men to police forces during Reconstruction was a historic moment, but a short one. By the end of the 1870s, as Democrats regained control of municipal and state governments, they either directly fired the policemen or transitioned them out.⁴²⁴ The black

⁴¹⁹ Abbott, *For Free Press and Equal Rights*, 119.

⁴²⁰ Rousey, *Policing the Southern City*, 197–98.

⁴²¹ Rousey, "Black Policemen in New Orleans During Reconstruction," 232.

⁴²² Mark de Vries has also noted that the lack of information on daily practices deserves further research. See Mark Leon de Vries, "Between Equal Justice and Racial Terror: Freedpeople and the District Court of DeSoto Parish during Reconstruction," *Louisiana History* 56, no. 3 (Summer 2015): 266.

⁴²³ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 122–23.

⁴²⁴ Dennis C. Rousey, "Yellow Fever and Black Policemen in Memphis: A Post-Reconstruction Anomaly," *The Journal of Southern History* 51, no. 3 (August 1985): 359–60.

press only feebly responded to this retrenchment, with few articles voicing frustrations and quashed hopes. A letter from Mobile, for example, commented that “[t]he political status [...] looks very gloomy indeed [...] [b]ecause Horst is Mayor, and Horst is Democrat. So those colored police are no more.”⁴²⁵ Perhaps the newspapers wrote little on the topic because of the speed and force with which Redemption struck the South. The firing of black policemen was only one of many regressions the editors were confronted with. Moreover, they had seemingly been aware of the transitory nature of this progress from the start. As early as 1870, a letter to the *New Era* had detailed this worry: “How long we shall have colored Councilmen, policemen, and overseers of the poor, we know not.”⁴²⁶ Nonetheless, it is striking that the black press barely responded to the dismissals, especially because the appointment of black policemen had been an occasion for celebration a decade earlier. The antebellum press had focused on “positive messages, and mostly good news” as conditions in the South deteriorated towards the Civil War, which Frankie Hutton claims was a means “to keep the hope of degraded free blacks alive.”⁴²⁷ The black press may have been similarly responding to Redemption.

However, white conservative reaction did not strike all areas of the United States equally, as demonstrated by the black press’s continued reporting on African Americans being appointed to the police. The similarity to the earlier discourse suggests that a reevaluation of Reconstruction’s meaning and periodization is necessary. As had been the case in the 1870s, the Harrisburg *State Journal* celebrated seeing black policemen, commenting that “[o]ur colored police look well in their uniform.”⁴²⁸ Furthermore, the Indianapolis *Freeman* was generous in its admiration, describing the characters of their city’s seven black officers as “intelligent, wide awake” and boasting of a particular policeman as “one of the finest specimens of physical manhood on the force.”⁴²⁹ The paper even showcased its renowned ability to publish illustrated material, which few papers had the resources to do,⁴³⁰ with a quarter-page-sized depiction of all of the officers. Moreover, as had been the case during Reconstruction, the press compared results between cities. A New York and a Cleveland paper both reprinted the Detroit *Plaindealer*’s article wishing the cities success, as they too “are wrestling with the question of appointing colored police.”⁴³¹ The

⁴²⁵ “For the *Louisianian*,” *Semi-Weekly Louisianian*, June 15, 1871.

⁴²⁶ “Letter from Petersburg,” *New Era*, March 10, 1870.

⁴²⁷ Hutton, *The Early Black Press*, 158.

⁴²⁸ “Atlantic City,” *State Journal*, July 12, 1884.

⁴²⁹ “The Colored Patrolmen,” *Freeman*, March 16, 1889.

⁴³⁰ Wilson II, *Black Journalists in Paradox*, 49.

⁴³¹ “Odds and Ends,” *New York Freeman*, June 17, 1886; “Some Race Doings,” *Cleveland Gazette*,” June 24, 1886.

Cleveland Gazette boasted of their city's advancements, including "a couple of colored men on her police force for a couple of years" and makes the point: "*Follow* our example."⁴³² The *Washington Bee* continued to pursue an activist approach, appealing to the police major to "give the colored man a chance" in appointments.⁴³³ These examples demonstrate that a further examination delving beyond the traditional end-date of 1877 is necessary, as black policemen continued to be working on the force throughout the 1880s and discursive continuities are apparent in the black press.

Understanding the officers as a legacy of Reconstruction surviving past the compromise of 1877 emphasizes the "enduring legacies of the war and the postbellum struggle," something Nystrom suggests should be considered.⁴³⁴ Beyond the questions this raises about periodization,⁴³⁵ the examples also indicate that, if Reconstruction is understood as a process, namely, "the adjustment of American society to the end of slavery,"⁴³⁶ then this process occurred at different speeds and depths throughout the country. Rather than Southern cities hiring black policemen, as had been the case in the 1860s and 1870s, later nineteenth-century enlistment appears to have developed in the country's North⁴³⁷ and West.⁴³⁸ Especially the latter promises to be a fruitful avenue of research, as the existence of black policemen in Kansas in particular is likely to have been tied to the Exoduster movement, a connection not yet made in the research. It is clear that African Americans did not only start being hired by police forces in the mid-twentieth-century, as is often claimed. An examination of this phenomenon from Emancipation to the early twentieth century is sorely needed in order to fully capture the history of biracial policing in the United States.

The possibilities opened up during the Reconstruction period are evident not only from the very fact that African American men were hired as police officers but also from the discourse in the black press, which indicates that the editors saw themselves and their community not just as a segregated or oppressed minority but also as part of a larger political project that promised to change the nation. They were willing and able to assertively make their voice heard during this process, if not always successfully. The simple existence of black policemen further

⁴³² "Some Race Doings," *Cleveland Gazette*, June 24, 1886.

⁴³³ "For Major Walker's Eye," *Washington Bee*, October 23, 1886.

⁴³⁴ Nystrom, *New Orleans after the Civil War*, 4.

⁴³⁵ For a debate on the periodization, see *ibid.*, 244; Richardson, "North and West of Reconstruction," 90.

⁴³⁶ Foner, *Reconstruction*, xxv.

⁴³⁷ For example, a correspondent with the *Washington, D.C., Bee* reports that, rather than firing their black policemen, Philadelphia had hired more. See, "Our Philadelphia Letter," *Washington Bee*, January 27, 1883.

⁴³⁸ "Topeka Whispers," *Western Recorder*, May 24, 1883.

invalidates any myth of progress, as they demonstrate that, rather than a smooth march from slavery in the past to freedom today, American history is replete with spurts, starts, and discontinuities. As with many of Reconstruction's advances, modern readers may be surprised to hear of black policemen. This suggests that the period is still understudied, and its meaningfulness underappreciated. W. E. B. Du Bois had remarked that "[t]he unending tragedy of Reconstruction" was "the utter inability of the American mind to grasp its real significance."⁴³⁹ This paper humbly aspires to have endeavored to help readers understand the period somewhat better and to realize that, under adverse circumstances, people fought harder, and achieved more, than we often imagine possible today.

⁴³⁹ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, 708.

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