

STOMACH EQUALITY: AN ANALYSIS OF THE PRACTICAL EFFECTS OF WHITE
SUPREMACY ON THE ORGANIZING DRIVES OF THE
BROTHERHOOD OF TIMBER WORKERS

A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS
IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE
TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND POLITICAL SCIENCE
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

BY

PHILIP SMITH B.A.

DENTON, TEXAS

AUGUST 2021

Copyright © Philip Smith, 2021

DEDICATION

For my wife, Ella Nora Smith. Without your patience and support, I would have never
achieved this.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to begin by thanking my thesis chair, academic advisor, mentor, and friend Dr. Katherine Landdeck. Three years ago, I randomly decided to pick her class, which reignited my passion for graduate studies in history. In addition, her help and guidance in the creation of this work has been indispensable. On a personal note, her help and support in mine and my family's time of need is greatly appreciated. Dr. Landdeck has gone above and beyond, and I want to thank her as both a mentee and friend. In addition, I would like to thank Dr. Paul Travis. Dr. Travis was instrumental in helping me pick this topic. He also provided invaluable research tips that made this work possible. Dr. Jonathan Olsen gave me the space to both develop my ideas and see them from a different light. His insights and suggestions on the writing process proved to be invaluable. His contributions have shaped not only the structure, but the overall tone of this work. Finally, I would like to thank my wife Ella Nora Smith. Your love and support made this work possible. If it wasn't for your support and encouragement, I would have never taken the leap to go back to school. You have made my life immeasurably better, in both big and small ways. A thousand pages could not contain the gratitude and love that I have for you. Thank you habibti.

ABSTRACT

PHILIP SMITH

STOMACH EQUALITY: AN ANALYSIS OF THE PRACTICAL EFFECTS OF WHITE SUPREMACY ON THE ORGANIZING DRIVES OF THE BROTHERHOOD OF TIMBER WORKERS

AUGUST 2021

Like a specter, white supremacy has haunted this nation's history from the very beginning. It has even reared its ugly head in the institutions that are supposed to liberate working people, namely labor unions. What about the labor organizations that organizes on a biracial basis? How did white supremacy effect the day to day work of biracial organizations like the Brotherhood of Timber Workers (BTW)? This work examines the practical effects of white supremacy on the organizing drives of the BTW in the Piney Woods region of East Texas and Western Louisiana between 1910 and 1914. By using archival research and building on the work of previous scholars, this work finds that white supremacy, in various ways, negatively impacted the union's organizing drives.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. THE ORIGINS AND USES OF WHITE SUPREMACY	16
III. THE NEW SOUTH RISES	27
IV. THE BROTHERHOOD OF TIMBER WORKERS IN LOUISIANA.....	39
V. THE BROTHERHOOD OF TIMBER WORKERS IN TEXAS.....	56
VI. CONCLUSION.....	66
BIBLIOGRAPHY	68
APPENDICES	
A. MAP OF THE PINEY WOODS.....	72

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

White supremacy is a specter that has haunted American history for most of the nation's existence. After the first black indentured servants were brought to Jamestown in 1619, an economic system based on the exploitation of those with black skin developed and extended its tentacles across American society. To bolster the slave system, a legal system was built that codified the subjugation of black slaves. This was especially important in the early days of slavery since slave codes and other legal frameworks created separate statuses for slaves and poor whites. This separation and sense of "otherness" would be exploited by ruling elites with great effectiveness.

Soon, a social system developed that had both its origins in and served to bolster the slave economy. White supremacy may have had its origins in the slave economy of North America and the slave codes of the seventeenth century, but it developed and matured with horrible effect in the everyday sphere of American life. In the colonies and antebellum republic, whiteness was a status that (purportedly) gave even the humblest southern white laborer a degree of equality with the plantation elite of the South. In order to realize this false notion of equality, most southern whites actively supported the slave system and the strict social hierarchies created by it.¹

This social system was challenged to its core during Reconstruction. Newly freed blacks, in alliance with southern and northern Republicans, voted for and actively

¹ For a detailed discussion on the origins and uses of American white supremacy and racism, see George P. Rawick's *From Sundown To Sunup: The Making of the Black Community*. George P. Rawick, *From Sundown To Sunup: The Making of the Black Community* (Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1972).

participated in governments that challenged the old economic elite of the South and the old social system. In response, Southern Redeemer elites used racial violence and the rhetoric of white supremacy to crush southern reform governments. New challenges to the social system would require new legal methods of control. Jim Crow was primarily developed to crush southern populism. Populism was an existential threat to the social order since the populists sought to make alliances with the black community against their common enemy: the southern elite. Jim Crow not only politically disenfranchised blacks and poor whites, it also sought to physically separate them. The aim was to ensure that the poor of both races could not unite to challenge the economic and social system that oppressed them.²

New elites would find common cause with the planters. While southern industrialization happened much slower than in other parts of the country, by the 1890s new industries had gained a toe hold in the South. The industrialists of the New South supported the old southern planters in their attempts to crush political opposition. They also supported the old social system and seamlessly imbedded white supremacy in their workplaces. The unofficial segregation of the shop floor largely mirrored the official segregation in the public sphere. Industrialists also bolstered white supremacy by favoring whites in promotions and by almost exclusively hiring them for better paid skilled positions. Most southern labor unions (where they existed) did not seek to overturn the social order and either refused to organize black workers or tried to incorporate racist clauses in their contracts in order to keep companies from hiring black workers. Industries benefited immensely from white supremacy. By giving promotional

² The best discussion on how Southern elites responded to and overcame the challenges of Reconstruction is found in Woodward's *Origins of the New South: 1877-1913*. C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of The New South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951).

and hiring preferences to white workers, they were able to co-opt whatever cross-racial solidarity they had with the promises of advancement. When strikes did happen, industrialists hired black workers to scab. By dividing black and white workers and encouraging white supremacy in the workplace, industrialists were able to keep wages low. By accepting white supremacy, unions unwittingly ensured that they would always have a divided workforce and created the conditions for their failure to organize the South.³

However, not all unions refused to organize black workers. One such union was the International Workers of the World (IWW) affiliated Brotherhood of Timber Workers (BTW). Beginning in 1910, the union attempted to organize the lumber workers of the Piney Woods region of East Texas and western Louisiana. Their organizing drives continued until the union's disappearance in 1914. Lumber was the largest industry of the New South, and the Piney Woods was one of its richest extraction sites. The area had a history of resistance against the lumber barons, which was most clearly illustrated by a regional general strike in 1907. The area's importance to southern industry and its history of resistance made it an ideal location for organization.

In most historians' accounts of the union, they paint a picture of a biracial, revolutionary union that heroically fought the white supremacist power structure. This union not only organized black locals but was completely integrated. In short, historians have traditionally painted the BTW as an example of class solidarity overcoming racism. Is this the whole story though? Did the union members of East Texas and western Louisiana shed the culture and prejudices that had defined their society? This thesis

³ For more information, please read David Roediger's *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness*. David Roediger, *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working Class History* (New York: Verso Books, 1994).

argues that, in various ways, the system of southern white supremacy was a major contributing factor to the BTW's failure to organize the Piney Woods. Different manifestations of white supremacy contributed to this defeat in different ways depending on the region where the union organized. In Louisiana, white supremacy affected the union both from the outside in the form of Jim Crow, and from within in the form of a union leadership that was either uninterested or unable to seriously challenge white supremacy, denounce "social equality," and neglect to address the issues that only affected black workers. In Texas, the main factor that contributed to the union's defeat was an economic system that perpetuated the paternalism of the antebellum South and gave John Henry Kirby, the dominant lumber baron in East Texas, near dictatorial powers which he used to crush the BTW.

This begs the question, what is white supremacy? How does one define a system that seems to be so ubiquitous to the history of not only the South, but of the United States as a whole? On the surface, white supremacy is simple. White supremacy holds that white people are superior—in both a moral, cultural, and social sense—to non-white people. Not only are white people superior, but they also hold a privileged position in society in relation to other races, and must dominate them politically, socially, culturally, and economically. This thesis addresses the various ways that white supremacy expressed itself in the Piney Woods in the fields of personal, social, and economic relations. It pays special attention to the system of paternalism birthed in the days of slavery but carried over to the post-war South. Southern paternalism was a system built on mutual obligations between the patriarchs of southern society (initially the planters but this group would expand to include industrialists) and those below them. In return for political,

social, and economic control, southern patriarchs were expected to maintain the system of southern white supremacy, which created a false sense of equality based on the shared skin color of the patriarchs and southern whites and (at times) benefited white workers. The definitions provided above shapes the researcher's analysis throughout this thesis.

The work of historians has influenced this work, but they do not address the contribution of white supremacy to the BTW failure in the Piney Woods. A classic work that seeks to analyze white supremacy and how it affected the development of the South is W.J. Cash's *Mind of The South*. One of the many themes of the *Mind of The South* is the effect of white supremacy on black and white southerners. For Cash, the origins of white supremacy can be found in the institution of slavery and the plantation economy and social system that arose from it.⁴ Cash writes about how such a system not only justified the institution but also allows common white people to assume a position of equality with the planter based on race.⁵ This "Proto-Dorian Convention," the economic and social system of white supremacy, plays a prominent role in Cash's analysis. Cash believed that this system caused working class whites to "abandon his advance upon class consciousness and relapse into his ancient focus."⁶ The "Proto-Dorian Convention" creates solidarity between the white upper-class and white working class and keeps the latter from questioning their position in the economic order.

While there is a lot of truth in this claim, Cash fails to adequately explore and apply this principle to the economic and political sphere. This causes Cash to make some strange turns in his analysis; one sees this most clearly when he blames Northern

⁴ W.J. Cash, *The Mind of The South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941), 38-39.

⁵ Cash, 39.

⁶ Cash, 171.

carpetbaggers for Reconstruction violence, both racial and political.⁷ Historians such as C. Vann Woodward would try to correct this deficiency.

In *Origins of the New South 1877-1913*, C. Vann Woodward gives an account of how the Redeemers rested power back from the Reconstruction governments and defeated the forces that tried to challenge their power. Woodward writes about how Redeemer politicians and intellectuals played down economic issues and promoted white supremacy in order to maintain their power.⁸ Elites used a number of weapons (fraud, violence, racist propaganda, etc.) to beat back movements for reform and economic justice.⁹ In order to defeat the populists, their fiercest opponents, Redeemer governments brought in a number of legal mechanisms such as the poll tax, which not only disenfranchised southern blacks but also the poor whites that the populists tried to appeal to.¹⁰ Behind all of this, political violence, propaganda, and disenfranchisement, lay the specter of white supremacy and the system that it supported.¹¹

Woodward's analysis is excellent, but it still has one glaring deficiency. While Woodward devotes an entire chapter to the southern populism, he pays scant attention to the southern labor movement. Woodward writes that the unions perpetuated racism, "In spite of the many fine pronouncements that recall the idealistic policy of the Knights of Labor..."¹² In a stroke, Woodward writes off the history of the biracial industrial unions of the South. While it should not be claimed that these movements were pure, to overlook them is to miss out on a history of struggle that actively fought an economic and social system built on white supremacy.

⁷ Cash, 109.

⁸ Woodward, 51.

⁹ Woodward, 105.

¹⁰ Woodward, 55, 347-349.

¹¹ Woodward, 349.

¹² Woodward, 361.

The formation of these unions would have been impossible without the creeping industrialization of the post-war South. Gavin Wright's *Old South New South* records the economic changes that took place in the southern economy post-Civil War. Wright shows us an economy that is able to incorporate the structures of white supremacy within the new economic order. Despite the fact that most southern states *did not require* employers to segregate their workplace, segregation and discrimination in the workplace was prevalent.¹³ He also shows the prevalence of resource-based industries in the Southern United States and the importance of the lumber industry to the southern industrial economy. One gets a further sense of lumber's importance when they learn that until the 1920s lumber and timber related industries were the largest and most valuable manufacturing enterprises in the South.¹⁴ Despite the breadth of information in his work, the broad nature of his subject (the southern economy) does not allow for a detailed local analysis. Because of this, the reader is not able to get a real sense of how these changes affected individual regions and the people that lived in them.

An intimate story of the lumber industry is given in Robert S. Maxwell and Robert D. Baker's *Sawdust Empire*. By focusing on a specific region, the Piney Woods of East Texas, one gets a clearer sense of the people who actually built the industry. The authors trace the development of the industry from 1830 to the modern era. From its localized beginnings, the industry expanded rapidly after the arrival of the railroads in the 1870s and 1880s and grew to become Texas's largest industry.¹⁵ While in many ways *Sawdust Empire* is a very informative work, not much attention is paid to the struggles of

¹³ Gavin Wright, *Old South New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War* (United States: Basic Books, 1986), 181.

¹⁴ Wright, 159.

¹⁵ Robert S. Maxwell and Robert D. Baker, *Sawdust Empire: The Texas Lumber Industry, 1830-1940* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press), 35.

ordinary workers. When reading the book, there seems to be definite preference for the history of “great men” as opposed to the stories and struggles of ordinary workers. This can be seen in the space given to issue of conflict between workers and management. Surprisingly, only two and a half pages are dedicated to the BTW and their struggle against the lumber barons.¹⁶ Throughout the text, the authors show a preference for the stories of the rich and powerful over the ordinary people of the Piney Woods.

By reading Ruth Allen’s *East Texas Lumber Workers*, one gets a different picture of the world created by the people of the East Texas lumber industry. In describing the company towns of East Texas, Allen (quoting a labor organizer) states that one of the towns had “Rotten Shacks; rotten commissaries; rotten doctors; rotten insurance and always from fifty cents to \$1.00 a day under the other mills.”¹⁷ In the mills of the Kirby Lumber Company, the largest in the South, it was not unusual to have payday put off for up to five months.¹⁸ Mill owners became virtual dictators of the regions they controlled. They owned everything in the region and controlled its politics.¹⁹ Allen devotes an entire chapter of her book to labor unrest in the Piney Woods. The BTW plays a prominent role in this narrative, but her conclusion is somewhat lacking. When commenting on the failure of the IWW affiliated BTW, she states that “The antireligious attitude, the addiction to violence, and the uncompromising antisegregationism of the I.W.W. probably alienated it from the loyalty of most Texas workers.”²⁰ One would think that such a claim would be backed up with reasoning and evidence, but it is not. Even if there is truth to her assertion, such a bold statement deserves to be analyzed. The history of the

¹⁶ Maxwell and Baker, 129-130 and 133.

¹⁷ Ruth A. Allen, *East Texas Lumber Workers: An Economic and Social Picture, 1870-1950* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961), 149.

¹⁸ Allen, 148.

¹⁹ Allen, 155.

²⁰ Allen, 158.

BTW and its successes and failures should be looked at on its own terms. One ought to seriously analyze this important and often overlooked section of the nation's history.

A classic rendering of the story of the BTW can be found in Philip Foner's *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*. Foner describes an industry that is brutal with lumber barons who treat the Piney Woods as their own private feudal domains.²¹ He details the formation of the BTW and its development from a relatively conservative union to one with a radical focus.²² Foner pays special attention to the question of race. From the beginning of the chapter, Foner describes the lumber industry as one with a very large black workforce. He details how the union always organized black workers, first in segregated locals and then (going against the law) integrated locals, something that was unique during this time.²³

Race is another theme taken up in Mark Fannin's *Labor's Promised Land*. In describing the Piney Woods of East Texas and West Louisiana, Fannin describes a world where white supremacy defines the social order. In the New South, the old planter elite and the new industrial elites worked hand in hand to perpetuate white supremacy, and thereby, maintain their control in the region.²⁴ He details a union that, while always accepting black members, became more radical as the struggle with the lumber companies increased. While the union never directly attacked the region's racial norms, they did call for biracial class-based unity.²⁵ While the union went farther than any other southern organization had gone in breaking the color line, Fannin takes a largely

²¹ Philip S. Foner, *History of The Labor Movement in The United States: Volume IV: The Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-191* (New York: International Publishers, 1965) 234.

²² Foner, 237.

²³ P. Foner, 244.

²⁴ Mark Fannin, *Labor's Promised Land: Radical Visions of Gender, Race, and Religion in the South* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2003), 184.

²⁵ Fannin, 207.

uncritical look at the union's racial policy. It should be possible to acknowledge the contributions that the union made while fully acknowledging that they lived within a particular cultural and social context that obscured their ability to fully take on the "race issue." A more critical approach to the union's work in this area is necessary.

In Geoffrey Ferrel's informative and groundbreaking work, *The Brotherhood of Timber Workers and the Southern Lumber Trust*, Ferrel gives a complete sketch of the Brotherhood and their opponents. He writes at length about the racial context of the region that the BTW was organizing. He also details how the strategies used by the lumber barons to break the racial solidarity of the union.²⁶

While the last three works are excellent sources that cast light on a little talked about moment in American history, they all share the same criticism. They fail to adequately take a critical look at the BTW and the question of race. In racial matters, the BTW are portrayed as heroes largely overcoming the social structures and institutions around them. One gets the sense that the authors view the Brotherhood as heroic people who might have run into a few roadblocks regarding the race question, but largely managed to overcome it. While the authors of these works may classify the Brotherhood as a heroic lot, it must be remembered that they were people, and their beliefs and actions should be looked at critically. More recent scholarship has taken on this critical approach, some better than others.

One work that takes a critical approach to the work of the BTW is Ryan Gullet's *East Texas Theater of the Timber Wars*. Gullet's work asks a critical question that is lacking in other manuscripts: Why was the BTW not as successful in East Texas as it was

²⁶ Geoffrey Ferrel, *The Brotherhood of Timber Workers and the Southern Lumber Trust, 1910-1914* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1982), 772.

in western Louisiana?²⁷ His answer is multifaceted, but it can be summed up by stating that the workers of East Texas did not trust the BTW to deliver for them.²⁸ Rather, they preferred to remain loyal to John Henry Kirby (the dominant lumber baron in East Texas) because he was a benevolent figure who practiced welfare capitalism.²⁹ He also states, without much evidence, that the more positive reception of the BTW in western Louisiana is due to drastically different governments, societies, and cultures.³⁰ These reasons for the BTW's lack of success in East Texas do not seem to square with the official record of the conditions and actions of the Kirby Lumber Company in the Piney Woods and the demographic and cultural similarities between the two sides of the Sabine. Despite its weaknesses, Gullet's work contains a great deal of valuable information and asks important questions.

A work that is more successful in its critical evaluation of the BTW is Steven Andrew Reich's *The Making of a Southern Sawmill World*. Reich states that most accounts of the BTW have failed to critically analyze "the interracial character of the union and the struggle to forge an effective alliance of white and black lumber workers against the region's timber companies."³¹ Reich believes that many scholars have downplayed racial tension among the rank and file of the union and left out black voices.³² Reich seeks to achieve a balanced approach in his analysis of the union. He attempts to work with the assumption that not all workers were militant anti-racists, and

²⁷ Ryan Scott Gullet, *East Texas Theater of The Timber Wars 1910-1913: Kirby Lumber Company's War With the Brotherhood of Timber Workers* (Nacogdoches: Stephen F. Austin State University Press, 2010), 5.

²⁸ Gullet, 36.

²⁹ Gullet, 7.

³⁰ Gullet, 14.

³¹ Steven A. Reich, *The Making of a Sawmill World: Race, Class and Rural Transformation in The Piney Woods of East Texas 1830-1930* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 262.

³² Reich, 263.

neither were all workers white supremacists looking to crush their black comrades.³³ In his work, Reich takes an honest look at the activities of the union and notes periods of interracial unity while at the same time not shying away from the BTW's failures on the race question. While Reich's analysis of the union is compelling, it forms a minor part of his overarching history of the East Texas Piney Woods, and his focus is not white supremacy as such but the world that the workers of East Texas created.³⁴ While individuals, acting alone or as a part of a collective, do "create" the world that they inhabit, this act of creation is shaped by the social systems that define their understanding of the world and what is possible. The BTW inhabited a world that was shaped and defined by such a system: white supremacy. If the union is to be properly understood, then the overarching focus of any study that deals with it ought to be white supremacy and its effect on the union's work.

The answers to some of the questions posed in this thesis can be found in the archives of the East Texas Research Center at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas. The Kirby Lumber Company Papers, in particular, are a rich source of the day-to-day activities of the union. Within these papers, one finds the story of a union that seemed to be organizing throughout the Piney Woods of East Texas but failed to truly penetrate the workplaces and institutions of the region. The Kirby Lumber Company Papers also sheds light on the measures that John Henry Kirby (the powerful Texas labor baron and head of the Southern Lumber Operators Association) and his associates took to crush the union. The Kirby Company Papers also contain an impressive amount of the BTW's internal documents, publications, and circulars. In addition, the

³³ Reich, 267.

³⁴ Reich, 19.

archival materials of John Henry Kirby Papers at the University of Houston Library provide a snapshot of both the union's activity in the wider region of the Piney Woods and the measures undertaken by their enemies to crush them.

The East Texas Research Center also hosts the Department of Agriculture National Forest Service Collection, which contains several oral histories. These oral histories detail the lives of the ordinary people of the Piney Woods during the time period. They provide a snapshot of the worldview of the people of the Piney Woods and how this worldview affected the way they approached the issues of racism and white supremacy, especially as it related to the social customs and workplace organization of the Piney Woods. All of these sources are used to create a history of the BTW that focuses on the practical effects of white supremacy on the BTW's work. A sober account of the story of the BTW reveals a union that, while going further than almost any other organization of their day, could not fully shake off the white supremacist mentality that defined the world around them. In order to uncover this balanced account, one must examine the practical effect of white supremacy on the union's organizational work. How did the union struggle against it? By what extent did they succeed or fail? This work focuses on the everyday world of union members to examine how the organization they built both reflected and fought against the white supremacist social system that they inhabited. In a country that still struggles with the specter of racism, it is of utmost importance to give balanced assessments of organizations that have sought to fight it. By doing so, scholars and activists may be able to learn lessons in the struggle against a system that began haunting this country before it even existed.

This thesis addresses a variety of themes and issues that both provide context for the BTW's work and help to explain the effects of white supremacy on the union's organizing drives. Chapter Two provides a background of white supremacy in the United States. Special attention is paid to the economic and political foundations of white supremacy and its origins in the institutions of slavery. This chapter details how white supremacy grew beyond its economic roots to affect the everyday world of the Southern United States. While white supremacy was perpetuated by the ruling classes of the South and was used as a tool for social control, it became a defining feature of the everyday world of white southerners.

Chapter Two also argues that the system of white supremacy adapted to and helped define the new southern industries of the post-Reconstruction South. Special attention is paid to the lumber industry of the Piney Woods and the wider South. The chapter looks at how southern industry adapted itself to the system of white supremacy and how white supremacy affected the everyday lives of southern workers, both black and white. The chapter paints a picture of the world that the BTW inhabited, and the challenges that they would face in their organizational work.

Chapter Three details the history of the union in western Louisiana. It shows how the union took advantage of conditions that made the region ripe for organization to make inroads in organizing the mills and forests of western Louisiana. It also details the measures taken by the Southern Lumber Operators Organization (SLOA) to crush the union. The chapter shows that while the BTW began as a relatively conservative union, through struggle the union radicalized and moved from a union with segregated locals to one that was fully integrated. While the union made great strides in both integrating and

organizing black workers, the chapter argues (through careful examination of the union's racial policy) that the union's positions and practices surrounding the "the race question" were lacking, even by the standards of contemporary and previous political organizations.

Chapter Four details the history of the union in East Texas. This chapter asks why the union had less organizational "success" in East Texas compared to their comrades in western Louisiana. Through a careful analysis of the career of John Henry Kirby (the powerful East Texas lumber baron), his campaign to crush the union, and the power that he was able to wield in the region, the chapter argues that the union was hampered by a strong paternalist system based on white supremacy.

This thesis concludes with a brief overview of the effects of white supremacy on the BTW's organizing drives and the importance of this method of analysis. When one gives an honest assessment of the union's organizing drives, they must conclude that southern white supremacy was a major contributing factor to the BTW's defeat in the forests of East Texas and western Louisiana. While white supremacy contributed to this defeat in different ways depending on the region, it was the overarching factor in the union's failure to organize the workers of the Piney Woods. By critically analyzing this period, one gains insights on both the history of the region, and the forces in this country's culture and economy that inhibit the struggle for racial and economic justice.

CHAPTER II

THE ORIGINS AND USES OF WHITE SUPREMACY

Karl Marx said that “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.”³⁵ The tradition that shaped the world inhabited by the BTW was white supremacy. To understand how white supremacy shaped the attitudes, beliefs, and culture of the Piney Woods (the area that the BTW worked in) one must first briefly examine the history and uses of white supremacy in the South.

When the first Africans landed on the shores of Virginia in 1619, neither they nor the white inhabitants of Virginia could predict the ways in which slavery would affect the fabric of American history. While they were at first treated as relative equals with Virginia’s indentured servants, a new economic system (slavery) would develop and result in the subjugation and separation of those with black skin from both their owners and white compatriots.

This relative level of equality should not be exaggerated. Before the regularization and codification of slavery in the English colonies, the Spanish and Portuguese colonies to the South, and Dutch traders, had already developed the transatlantic slave trade. In the century preceding the arrival of the Africans in Virginia, slavery in the lower half of the

³⁵ Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte” (Marx/Engels Internet Archive, 1999), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm>

Americas had become nearly synonymous with black skin.³⁶ There is also evidence from Elizabethan poetry that Blackness, as such, had a negative connotation.³⁷ Early legal rulings also point to a generalized belief in black inferiority. Howard Zinn reports a legal ruling from 1630 that sentenced Hugh Davis, a white man, to be whipped for sleeping with a black woman.³⁸

Despite the clear evidence of bigotry and colorism against the black inhabitants of colonial Virginia, this should not be confused with the organized system of racism and white supremacy that would develop with the regularization and codification of slavery. Systemic racism, and the culture of white supremacy that grew from it, can be traced to the fear of cooperation between the white and black captive work force.

This fear is evidenced in the growing body of legislation that regulated relations between white indentured servants and slaves. A Virginia statute from 1661 stated that if any indentured servants ran away with slaves, then they would owe extra years of service to the slave's master.³⁹ Another statute from 1691 proscribed banishment for any white man or woman "who shall intermarry with a negro, mulattoo, or Indian man or woman bond or free."⁴⁰

Virginia's 1691 statute is particularly noteworthy since it bans what could be described as the most intimate type of fraternization: marriage. Colonial elites were so afraid of white/black cooperation that they tried to ban the most the most intimate types of relationships. These laws should be seen as an attempt to not only regulate relations between the races, but to set up completely different spheres for both. The hope being

³⁶ Howard Zinn, *A People's History of The United States* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015), Kindle Edition, Location 1072.

³⁷ Zinn, 1191.

³⁸ Zinn, 1171.

³⁹ Zinn, 1211.

⁴⁰ Zinn, 1211.

that the creation of different spheres would dampen the possibilities for cooperation between slaves and indentured servants, making the formation of a united front against their master's impossible.

The creation of this separate sphere was particularly important after Bacon's rebellion. While the causes of the rebellion are complex, it began as an outgrowth of skirmishes between frontier settlers and the Native tribes of Virginia and Maryland and the perceived inability of the colonial government to ensure the safety of the frontier. It quickly became a general revolt against Virginia's planter upper-class. Virginians from all classes joined the rebellion. What was most disquieting (from the perspective of planters) was the fact that Virginia's black population joined the rebellion as well. Black slaves had joined with their white indentured servant comrades in open class warfare. The greatest fear of Virginia's planter elite had come true: white servants and black slaves had put aside their differences to topple their common enemy.

In the aftermath of the rebellion, planter elites did their utmost to make sure that cross-racial cooperation would not threaten their power ever again. Virginia's elites sought to codify white supremacy, especially as it concerned the treatment of white slaves and black servants. The apotheosis of this effort was "An act Concerning Servants and Slaves," more commonly known as the Virginia Slave Codes of 1705. The act both created new rights for white indentured servants and took rights away from slaves.

The act guaranteed that white indentured servants would only spend five years in servitude.⁴¹ It further stipulated that masters had to provide their servants with adequate clothing, housing, and food; the act also forbade the whipping of servants unless ordered

⁴¹ William Waller Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia from the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619* (Philadelphia: R. & W. & G. Bartow, 1823), 447.

by a magistrate.⁴² Furthermore, the act provided a legal mechanism for servants to lodge complaints and seek restitution from their masters and gave protections for sick or injured servants.⁴³ Indentureship could only be given to those who were either free in a Christian country, or those who could prove that they were free in England. All peoples who came from a non-Christian country would be considered slaves, even if they converted.⁴⁴ This had the effect of codifying the racial nature of slavery, since slave traders were actively importing non-Christian Africans. Indenture and the prospect of freedom had effectively become limited to white, Christian Europeans.

While the rights of servants were advancing, the rights of slaves were receding. Masters were given new property rights over their slaves. According to the act, people were not allowed to engage in commerce with, hire, or even give money to slaves without their masters consent.⁴⁵ Slaves were not allowed to leave their master's property without their permission and legal authorities were now obligated to recover runaways.⁴⁶ Slaves were not allowed to own arms and masters could not be found criminally *liable for killing their slaves* in the course of punishing them.⁴⁷ The act also ensured the lifetime subjugation of slaves by decreeing that slave children would take on the condition of their mother.⁴⁸ Finally, the act criminalized both interracial sex and marriage.⁴⁹

The Virginia Slave Codes mark a watershed in the formation of white supremacy. It (and acts like it) codified the institution of slavery and legislated white supremacy. The code provided for the "special treatment" of the white underclass in comparison to the

⁴² Henning, 448.

⁴³ Henning, 449.

⁴⁴ Henning, 448.

⁴⁵ Henning, 451.

⁴⁶ Henning, 456 and 457.

⁴⁷ Henning, 459.

⁴⁸ Henning, 460.

⁴⁹ Henning, 453 and 454.

colony's slaves. One can see the beginning of the legal notion that slave owners had special rights regarding their slaves and that white citizens had a degree of equality with planter elites due to their skin color. Once enacted, these laws would have a marked effect on the wider culture. Slavery statutes created a sense of "otherness" between blacks and whites. This sense of otherness would greatly dampen the possibility of cross-racial collaboration against the planter elite. Furthermore, by making black skin a mark of what could be called the absolute bottom of society, it changed how whites saw themselves in relation to both black slaves and their white masters. W.J. Cash writes about this cultural phenomenon in *The Mind Of The South*.

Slavery had not only changed the economic reality of the south, but it also changed the everyday reality of white southerners. The underpinning of white supremacy was the belief that southern whites had a degree of equality with the south's ruling class based on their skin color. This "Proto-Dorian Convention" meant that poor whites could find common cause with planter elites based on racial solidarity.⁵⁰ In other words, the South was built on a new social system that elevated whites (no matter how poor) in comparison to slaves who represented an absolute bottom that no white man could fall to.

Cash spells out the implications of the Proto-Dorian convention very neatly when he states that the convention caused the average working-class white man to "abandon his advance upon class consciousness and relapse into his ancient focus."⁵¹ In other words, class solidarity was abandoned in favor of racial solidarity with southern planter elites. This fictive equality based on skin color would be used to great effect. The antebellum South was a far cry from the world of Bacon's rebellion. Poor whites would not link arms

⁵⁰ Cash, 38-39.

⁵¹ Cash, 171.

with black slaves in revolt against their agrarian masters. Rather, southern whites by and large defended the system. One might ask why this is so? The thing that needs to be kept in mind and emphasized is that white supremacy and racism could not be boiled down to bad attitudes. It embedded itself and, to a large degree, helped define southern culture. This cannot be emphasized enough. White supremacy had initially been codified into a set of laws but once those laws were enforced into the everyday lives of southerners, new systems of culture and self-understanding developed. In a sick sort of way, white supremacy gave poor southern whites a sense of dignity. Theoretically, they were on par with the grandest members of society. This degree of equality was not due to anything they had done, rather *it was their birthright*. White supremacy, and the small privileges it gave to poor whites, had an enormous effect on the southern mindset. Ordinary whites became attached to their “way of life” and the economic system (slavery) that drove it. This identification ran so deep that white southerners sacrificed their lands and lives to defend the master’s system.

It was the master of course, who benefited the most from this system. The master reaped the benefits of an economic system that provided him with a captive work force, and a social system that legitimized the subjugation of that force on the one hand and justified the master’s position in society on the other. Southern planters formed the top of this system based on a new type of paternalism. Rather than the patron/client relations that formed the basis of the old paternal systems, southern paternalism was formed on a new basis. Cash tells us that

The actual fact was simply that, unaware of any primary conflict in interest, and seeing the planter not as an antagonist but as an old friend or kinsmen, the common white naturally fell into the habit of honoring him as *primus inter pares*,

of deferring to his knowledge and judgement, of consulting him on every occasion, and of looking to him for leadership and opinion-and, above all, for opinion in politics.⁵²

This personal form of paternalism then was one based on a kind of “consent.” Since the planter and poor white had a degree of equality, poor whites *allowed* southern planters to run society in their own interests. One should not assume, however, that this was a benevolent type of paternalism. The basis of this relative *social* equality was based on the subjugation and exploitation of African slaves. The paternal masters of the south had awesome powers of control (literally life and death) over the people that they held captive. While they may have held a certain amount of legal and social responsibility towards the members of their “household,” the power dynamics decidedly shifted towards the top of the system. Slave masters could be either kind or cruel to their captive workforce. Conversely, the fact that they had this captive workforce allowed them to control southern society. Southern paternalism may have been based on a sort of consensual relationship between poor whites and southern planters, but one should not make the mistake of conflating consent with a lack of authority. Southern planters controlled the South in a way that was reminiscent of the feudal lords of medieval Europe. This new system of paternalism gave them absolute power over the homestead, control over the economy, and control over the political system. While their power was presumably based on consent, that power, once exercised, became nearly absolute.

The biggest challenge to the power of the southern planters would come in the aftermath of the Civil War. Reconstruction (and later populism) would prove to be the biggest challenges to the planter elite since Bacon’s Rebellion. Once again, a multiracial

⁵² Cash, 52.

movement sought to challenge and overthrow the white power structure that ruled southern society. For all the laudable achievements of the Reconstruction governments, they failed in the crucial task of destroying the power structure of the old slave system.

The old elites defeated both the Radical Republicans and the Populists by doubling down on and adapting white supremacy to the new reality of the postwar south. Southern politicians would evoke the old Proto-Dorian Convention to assert the necessity of white solidarity and deemphasize the necessity of economic justice.⁵³ These so called Redeemers emphasized the necessity of returning the south to the old ways and “the crushing of negro power and the ousting of foreign control.”⁵⁴ While their modern descendants decry the use of “identity politics,” identity, specifically the reassertion of white identity and the control that came with it, was central to their political mission.

The way that this power was wrested back was, of course, through violence. The racial violence of the Redeemers began as soon as the war ended but would reach its height around election time. The effects of this violence can be seen during the presidential election of 1868. During the election, the Ku Klux Klan released a reign of terror on the South’s black population. Some of the targets of this reign of terror was the white and black leadership of the southern Republicans. Arkansas congressman James M. Hinds, three members of the South Carolina Legislature, and numerous state constitutional convention delegates were assassinated.⁵⁵ Ordinary black voters were targeted as well. Nearly 200 black men were killed in Saint Landry Parish, while in New Orleans, gangs of white men attacked black voters and broke up Republican meetings.⁵⁶

⁵³ Woodward, 51.

⁵⁴ Woodward, 51.

⁵⁵ Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990), 146.

⁵⁶ E. Foner, 146.

The success of this violent strategy could be seen in both Louisiana and Georgia, which were carried by Horatio Seymour (the Democratic candidate). Even in states where Ulysses Grant won the day, the Republican vote was sharply decreased.⁵⁷ The relative success of Redeemer violence would cause them to double down on this tactic and would ultimately lead to their victory throughout the South.

With the advent of the Populists, the Redeemers would employ the old violent methods and add legal restrictions and mass disenfranchisement to further ensure their control. The Populists committed the twin southern sins of attacking the wealth and privileges of southern elites and attempting to form a united front with poor blacks. To beat back the initial success of the Populists, the Redeemers and their red shirt foot soldiers ramped up political violence and employed outright fraud. In 1892, the presidential debut of the Populists, 162 blacks were lynched in the south.⁵⁸ The Populists were attacked using the language and justifications of white supremacy. Cash tells us “That from hustings and from pulpits thousands of voices proclaimed him traitor and nigger-loving scoundrel; reengage to Sothern Womanhood, the Confederate dead, and the God of his fathers; champion of the transformation of the white race into a mongrel breed.”⁵⁹ In other words, a vote for the Populists was a vote against the old sense of racial solidarity that made the south work. If the poor whites and blacks could make common cause against their common oppressors, then the social system that benefited the old ruling class would be broken. The Populists were an existential threat because they sought to make common cause between poor whites and blacks. Violence and white

⁵⁷ E. Foner, 146.

⁵⁸ Cash, 170.

⁵⁹ Cash, 170.

supremacy were used to divide poor whites and blacks. This would be a reiteration of a common theme in American history.

To extinguish the Populists once and for all, Redeemer governments brought in several legal mechanisms (such as the poll tax), which disenfranchised both poor whites and blacks. Disenfranchisement was sold as a method to both cut down on voter fraud and as a way to keep the black population in its “place.”⁶⁰ Furthermore, it was thought to be unnatural that blacks should be the “arbiters” between blacks and whites; the Redeemers further added that the elimination of the black vote would lead to “honest” competition between the different classes of whites.⁶¹ These arguments (rooted in white supremacy) proved so successful that some Populist legislators even voted for their inclusion in state constitutions.⁶² Ultimately, disenfranchisement would be a death knell for the southern Populists. White supremacy had reasserted itself in the aftermath of the Civil War and was used to ensure the political, physical (in the form of Jim Crow), and finally economic subjugation of the Black population.

White supremacy would come to define all spheres of southern life. Theoretically, the creeping industrialization of the South should have opened the potential for cross-racial cooperation in the form of unionism. This was not to be. When the AFL (American Federation of Labor) craft unions organized in the South, they acquiesced to the norms of white supremacy and allowed for the creation of separate white and black locals and

⁶⁰ Woodward, 347-348.

⁶¹ Woodward, 347.

⁶² Woodward, 349.

unions.⁶³ Craft unions then enabled and allowed for the spread of white supremacy in both its organizations and on the worksite.⁶⁴

The exclusion of black workers from profitable trades would lead to the further separation and increased exploitation of black workers. This exclusion was even happening in professions that had traditionally been carried by black workers such as tobacco manufacturing.⁶⁵ Between 1870 and 1904, black participation in the skilled trades of New Orleans would decrease by ninety percent.⁶⁶ Increasingly, black workers who were engaged in non-agricultural work were forced into the most unskilled and dangerous types of industrial jobs: coal mining, railroad construction, and the lumber industry.⁶⁷

This then was the world that the BTW was created in. It was a world that had seen the crushing defeats of two multiracial political movements in the last thirty years. It was a world that was wholly defined by the precepts of white supremacy. Like a cancer, white supremacy infected the social, political, and economic spheres. It was a world where the threat of racial violence was ever present. It was in this world that the industrial unions of the south tried to organize white and black workers. The BTW was one of these unions. Through their daily work, they had to fight with, adapt to, and were influenced by a social system that served to prop up the masters of southern industry.

⁶³ Woodward, 361.

⁶⁴ Woodward, 361.

⁶⁵ Woodward, 360.

⁶⁶ Woodward, 361.

⁶⁷ Woodward, 360.

CHAPTER III

THE NEW SOUTH RISES

While the antebellum political order had managed to survive and adapt to the post-war world, economic realities were beginning to change. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century South would see creeping industrialization. Southern industry was dominated by the so-called “extractive industries” of the mine and mill. The most predominant of these industries was the lumber industry and few areas of the South would see the development that was seen in the Piney Woods region of Eastern Texas and Western Louisiana. Economic change did not automatically equal social change though; the new economic system would adapt to the social system of white supremacy that defined economic and social relations. The BTW had to both adapt to and respond to this social system.

While the beauty of the Piney Woods has long been recognized, the potential of the Piney Woods as a source for timber had been recognized since the eighteenth century. The Spanish priests and monks who established missions in the Piney Woods during the second decade of the eighteenth century may have been the region’s first loggers.⁶⁸ Minor logging operations (often of a temporary nature) would continue throughout the antebellum period. The United States Census of 1860 recorded 200 sawmills with 1200 employees in Texas; the industry generated 1.75 million dollars in products annually.⁶⁹ In addition, another 300 people were employed in industries that depended on the lumber

⁶⁸ Robert S. Maxwell and Robert D. Baker, *Sawdust Empire: The Texas Lumber Industry, 1830-1940* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1983), 17.

⁶⁹ Maxwell and Baker, 19.

industry such as construction, carpentry, and cabinet making.⁷⁰ While it was not an insignificant industry, lumber would play a minor role in the antebellum economies of Texas and Louisiana in favor of agricultural products such as cotton and sugar cane.

This would change in the post-war South. While the region did not become as industrialized as its northern neighbors, the South would witness a process of creeping industrialization throughout the region. The most valuable of these industries was the lumber industry. In 1870, the South accounted for 11 percent of the United States' lumber output, by 1910 that figure jumped to 45 percent.⁷¹ Between 1880 and 1910, the number of people employed in the lumber industry jumped from 27,690 to 304,093 people, a growth rate of more than 1,000 percent.⁷² In fact, the lumber industry became so predominate that by 1900, one fifth of the South's industrial workforce was employed in it.⁷³

Why did the southern lumber industry grow as fast as it did? The first answer is simply that the South had the material. In 1880, the South had twice as much pine timber as the rest of the country.⁷⁴ While there had been some industrial activity in the South before the war, the vast forests of Piney Woods (a heavily forested ecoregion of the South covering parts of East Texas, western Louisiana, southern Arkansas, and southeastern Oklahoma), and other areas of the South, remained largely untouched. In a country that was industrializing and expanding as fast as the United States was, the timber and lumber by-products that could be extracted from the Piney Woods were not only profitable but necessary.

⁷⁰ Maxwell and Baker, 19.

⁷¹ Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise Of The New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 125.

⁷² Wright, 160.

⁷³ Ayers, 125.

⁷⁴ Wright, 161.

Land availability was another factor in the southern lumber industry's rapid expansion. With the repeal of the Southern Homestead act in 1876, millions of acres of unspoiled forest were opened up for lumber production.⁷⁵ Northern industrialists were quick to buy up as much public land as possible and sent "cruisers" (company agents) to scout the land.⁷⁶ Between 1881 and 1888, 5.5 million acres of public land had been sold to these "cruisers."⁷⁷ In addition, scores of farmers (facing unfavorable economic conditions) sold their land to the timber companies.⁷⁸ The expansion of railroads would provide the final ingredient for the commercial exploitation of the Piney Woods. Before the expansion of the railroads, companies and lumbermen had to rely on the rivers of East Texas for their transportation needs. Railroads gave the timber companies the chance to have a reliable, year-round transportation system for their products.⁷⁹ The expansion of the railroads also changed the relationship between the companies and the lumber workers. Before the rapid expansion of the late-nineteenth century, lumbering was a part-time occupation for many of the farmers of the Piney Woods. Either farmers often made extra money by cutting down trees and selling them downriver to wood dealers or the scant sawmills in the area.⁸⁰ The buying up of the forests and the expansion of the railroads would change this dynamic forever. The possibility of year-round camps (thanks to the railroads) meant that the lumber companies wanted to get the maximum value from the land by employing full-time lumbermen in permanent camps to fell as

⁷⁵ Bernard A. Cook and James R. Watson, *Louisiana Labor: From Slavery to "Right-To-Work"* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), 125. The Southern Homestead Act of 1866 set aside millions of acres of southern public land for purchase by both freed slaves and poor whites, at below market rates. Despite low land prices, most freed slaves did not have enough capital to purchase land. This would ultimately lead to the act's repeal.

⁷⁶ Ayers, 124.

⁷⁷ Ayers, 124.

⁷⁸ Ayers, 124.

⁷⁹ Ayers, 124.

⁸⁰ Ayers, 123.

many trees as possible.⁸¹ The lumber companies were now setting the terms for work and the wider economy of the South. The power dynamic shifted decisively in favor of the lumber companies who sought to exploit the forests and change the economy for their benefit. In a region like the Piney Woods, these lumbermen would remake the landscape, both literally and figuratively.

Often when historians talk about historic change, the human stories of this change tend to get lost in numbers and tables. The transition in the Piney Woods from an agricultural mode of life to an industrial was fraught with hardship and tension. The newly industrialized workforce clung to old agricultural attitudes around work, land rights, and a close relationship to nature that was at odds with the regimentation, discipline, and focus on efficiency and productivity found in the lumber camps and mills.⁸² People who had been farmers now participated in the destruction of the land on which they had previously depended. New patterns of work, changes in routine, and the uprooting of traditional ways of life created or exacerbated conflicts between neighbors, within families, and between whites and blacks.⁸³

In fact, the institution of white supremacy was one institution that the new industrial masters of the South sought to preserve and adapt. The organization of Jim Crow (a series of laws that led to discrimination against and disenfranchisement of African Americans) is a well-known story and the Piney Woods was affected in the same ways as the rest of the South. Jim Crow did not merely change the law, it strengthened and extended the social system of racism and white supremacy. When one reads oral

⁸¹ Ayers, 124.

⁸² Cook and Watson, 126.

⁸³ Steven A. Reich, *The Making of a Southern Sawmill World: Race, Class, and Transformation in The Piney Woods of East Texas, 1830-1930* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 11.

histories about the Piney Woods during the early 1900s, they get a sense of the parallel worlds that existed in the camps and small towns of the Piney Woods. Like other towns throughout the South, lumber camps such as Bannister (located in San Augustine County, Texas) contained white sections and black sections.⁸⁴ The customs that people followed served to enforce white superiority. In an interview with the National Forest service, R.Z. Hinson, a person who grew up around the labor camps of the Piney Woods, tells the interviewer about an older black woman that worked for his grandfather. He states that, when his grandfather's employee came to their house "she didn't come in at the front door, she always came at the back door, you know...she never went in the front part of the house. She always, but they don't do that anymore."⁸⁵ Thus in their daily lives, the people of the Piney Woods inhabited a world that was defined by white supremacy. It could be seen in the layout of their towns, and the rituals and customs that they acted out in their daily lives. The workplace itself was no different.

Workplaces in the New South followed the same patterns of discrimination as the wider world outside of it. Segregation in the workplace was manifested in two different ways. First, discrimination occurred by industry. When one looks at the racial compositions of southern industries, they notice a distinct pattern. Entire industries in the south were demarcated by race. Industries such as cotton textiles and furniture manufacturing were largely white, while lumber and tobacco were largely black.⁸⁶ This pattern of racial discrimination can also be seen in the types of jobs held by white and

⁸⁴ Luther Mosley, Interview by Faye Green, August 11, 1997, *Interview 1242*, transcript, The United States Department of Agriculture National Forest Service Collection, East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin University, 16.

⁸⁵ R.Z. Hinson, Interview by Faye Green and Alicia Hubbard, June 10, 1997, *Interview 1226*, transcript, The United States Department of Agriculture National Forest Service Collection, East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin University, 25.

⁸⁶ Wright, 179.

black workers. In 1910, black workers comprised 62.8 percent of the South's lumber industry.⁸⁷ Despite this, only 39.9 percent of black workers were semiskilled, and 23.6 percent were sawyers (a skilled occupation). This racial discrepancy between unskilled, semiskilled, and skilled workers was even more pronounced in Texas. Only 29.8 percent of semiskilled sawmill workers were black, while 21.6 percent of sawyers were black.⁸⁸ In comparison, 67.7 percent of semiskilled workers and 74.9 percent of sawyers were American born whites, respectively.⁸⁹ Ultimately what one sees when they delve into the employment figures is an employment structure that exhibits higher occurrences of job discrimination the more skilled an occupation is. This occurred even though discrimination was not mandated by law in the workplace.⁹⁰ Why was jobsite discrimination so widespread?

The reason for this can partly be described by the racism that was prevalent in a society defined by white supremacy. In his interview, Luther Mosley, a white logger who was born in and subsequently worked in the lumber camps and forests of the Piney Woods, was asked why the turpentine industry, an industry connected to the lumber industry, was mostly black. His answer is revealing.

MOSLEY: And again, yeah and even smelling that turpentine, pretty hard on white people. Now the colored people could take that more than the whites could, didn't they.

GREEN: You think it's because they had to?

MOSLEY: Well, no it's because the breathing of it, breathing it in, now you

⁸⁷ Wright, 179.

⁸⁸ Reich, 127.

⁸⁹ Reich, 127.

⁹⁰ Wright, 178.

know. For whites, they couldn't stand as much of it as colored people.

They could stand a lot of it, a lot more than whites.⁹¹

In his justification for the preponderance of black workers in the incredibly unhealthy and dangerous turpentine industry, one is reminded of the justifications for chattel slavery.

This line of thinking holds that because of black people's "biology," they are more suited to dangerous and/or menial jobs than white people. Job classifications based on racism and white supremacy can be found in other interviews as well. Another well-known trope can be found in the interview of R.Z. Hinson. Hinson tells us that

HINSON: All the colored people worked in the saw mills, you know. And in the woods mostly White people worked.

HUBBARD: Oh, really?

HINSON: Yea, very few colored people worked in the woods. HUBBARD: Oh they didn't, I'll be darned.

HINSON: Yea.

GREEN: I wonder why?

HINSON: Well, you know, well, to me, back then, people that worked in the woods had to be, you know, more intelligent people.⁹²

Hinson has employed another oft used justification for racism and white supremacy: They are not as smart as white people. The "intelligence" argument here is very clearly used to justify job discrimination. While one may dismiss these beliefs and attitudes today, these beliefs helped to shape and define southern culture and were viewed as common sense. It should not be assumed that beliefs were simply "turned off" at the job

⁹¹ Mosley, 26.

⁹² Hinson, 24.

site. Undoubtedly, the racist attitudes and assumptions of a culture built on white supremacy will have some effect in the hiring and promotional practices at the job site.

This system of job discrimination was further bolstered in another way. Put simply, white workers benefited from discrimination. A case study of occupational mobility in Birmingham, Alabama between 1880 and 1914 reveals that more than 80 percent of black workers who stayed at the same occupation for ten years were not given promotions to skilled or supervisory roles; in contrast, *half* of white workers received promotions within the same time frame.⁹³ Since similar discriminatory policies were practiced throughout the south, this study has much wider implications. By being given access to promotions and skilled apprenticeships, white workers directly benefited from white supremacy. Rather than having to be satisfied with the psychological and ideological superiority of the “Proto-Dorian Convention,” industrialization gave white workers something much more tangible: a higher likelihood that they would be able to materially change their station in life. In this way, industrialization strengthened white supremacy and racism. It confirmed (in their minds) the old attitudes and beliefs about white racial superiority, and it gave white workers a reason to support and defend a system which benefited them directly. The strengthening of white supremacy, and its defense by white workers, can even be seen in the unskilled jobs of the Piney Woods. White workers routinely used intimidation, threats, and violence to ensure their dominance in the largely unskilled work available in the forests.⁹⁴ In this way, they ensured that the most dangerous and menial jobs were left to black workers.⁹⁵ This was the world of the Piney Woods. It was a world intimately defined by white supremacy,

⁹³ Wright, 185.

⁹⁴ Reich, 137.

⁹⁵ Reich, 137.

where job discrimination was rampant, where white workers benefited from job site discrimination, and where racial violence could and would be employed at any moment. It was under these circumstances that the BTW tried to organize the white and black workers of the Piney Woods.

One might ask what role the unions played in the southern systems. After all, the fusion of white supremacy and industry created a racially divided work force. One could surmise that if the unions could not challenge the system of economic discrimination, then they could not succeed since one-half of the workforce could be set against the other half. Ultimately, the South's craft unions would not challenge white supremacy. Instead, these unions were more than happy to acquiesce to the prevailing economic and social system. In 1900, Samuel Gompers (the president of the American Federation of Labor) stated that he was in favor of organizing separate unions for black members since it "seemed impracticable to insist on the acceptance of Negro members."⁹⁶ Ten years later, Gompers stated that he was in favor of excluding black members entirely since they could not "understand the philosophy of human rights."⁹⁷ It is little wonder then that southern unions, by and large, included either official or tacit agreement with employers to either exclude or discriminate against black members.⁹⁸ These agreements not only solidified workplace discrimination, they helped in the crippling of southern unions. By accepting the logic of white supremacy craft unions created a situation where union drives could not succeed. By excluding or discriminating against thousands of black workers, they ensured that the unions would, by and large, be unable to carry successful strike actions or effectively utilize collective bargaining. Employers could and would use

⁹⁶ Woodward, 361.

⁹⁷ Samuel Gompers, quoted in Woodward, 361.

⁹⁸ Woodward, 361.

the threat of black scab labor to crush strikes, weaken organizing drives, and weaken collective bargaining.

Against the tide of racial exclusion stood the industrial unions of the south. Beginning with the Knights of Labor, industrial unions (unions that sought to organize an entire industry as opposed to individual crafts) tried to organize irrespective of workplace occupation or race. The subject of this study, BTW, was one such union. Beginning in 1910, they sought to organize the timber workers of the Piney Woods whether they be skilled or unskilled, white or black. Traditionally, the Brotherhood has been treated as working class heroes who put aside the racial prejudices of their region and fought the good fight against the powerful lumber barons of the south and white supremacy. When one examines the attitudes and actions of the members and leaders of the union, the union's relationship with what the radicals of the day called the "race question" becomes more complex and murkier. A good place to start would be to examine the stances on the "race question" by the Socialist Party of America. Both Arthur Lee Emerson and Jay Smith—the founders of the BTW—were affiliated with the party and the publishing organs of the party—both regionally and nationally—played a big role in both popularizing the union and served as an organizational tool. What one finds when they examine the documents is a gulf between the aims of the national party and the realities and limitations of southern racial politics.

When one reads the Socialist party of America's official documents, they are given a very clear picture of the party's official views on race. The *Negro Resolution* of the Indianapolis Convention of 1901 states that "The negroes of the United States, because of their long training in slavery and but recent emancipation therefrom, occupy a

peculiar position in the working class and in society at large.”⁹⁹ The document further states that the origin of this particular condition can be found in the capitalist system and that the capitalist class seeks to worsen the condition of black workers and to foment racial division between white and black workers.¹⁰⁰ This is both an interesting and compelling document. The official position of the Socialist Party was that black workers were not only oppressed as workers but faced a special type of oppression apart from their status as workers. This is an early example of what one might call intersectionality: the recognition that the struggle for racial equality is tied with the struggle for economic justice.

While the national party’s position on racial equality was laudable, the situation on the ground, especially in Texas, did not match the aspirations or even the stated beliefs of the party. In fact, Texas party leaders worked *against* the recruitment of black members.¹⁰¹ Tom Hickey, a leading member of the Socialist Party in Texas and an early proponent and popularizer of the BTW, reflected the bigotry of both the wider society and many, if not most, of his southern comrades. Hickey’s bigotry can be seen most readily when attacking his, and the party’s, opponents. While attacking the socialists, the Democrats used the tried-and-true language of white supremacy by accusing them of race mixing. In his response, Texas Socialist leader Tom Hickey wrote in his paper, *The Rebel*, that “there are five million mulattos in the South and I will give a \$20 dollar gold piece for each one that did have a Democrat for a daddy.”¹⁰² He then gives more

⁹⁹ Tim Davenport, “Negro Resolution Adopted by Indianapolis Convention [adopted August 1, 1901],” The Socialist Party of America Document Download Page, Marxist Internet Archive, accessed July 12, 2020, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/parties/spusa/1901/0801-spa-negroresolution.pdf>

¹⁰⁰ Davenport.

¹⁰¹ Donald Graham, *Red, White, and Black: An Interpretation of Ethnic and Racial Attitudes of Agrarian Radicals in Texas and Oklahoma, 1880-1920* (Regina: University of Saskatchewan Press, 1973), 146.

¹⁰² Tom A. Hickey, “Social Equality,” *The Rebel*, December 23, 1911.

examples of Democratic race mixing and accuses them of wanting racial equality.¹⁰³ He further states that capitalism forces white and black workers to work together, thereby creating the conditions for “social equality.”¹⁰⁴ In contrast, he states that “Socialism states to the negro “we guarantee economic equality” and that is all.”¹⁰⁵ The sentiments expressed in *The Rebel* was almost the polar opposite of the national party’s position. Rather than fighting racism and white supremacy, Hickey accepted it as natural. In other words, he had taken on the beliefs and attitudes of southern white supremacy. For Hickey, socialism provided a means for *separating the races*. The only liberation that socialism could offer (in Hickey’s mind) was that of economic liberation. There was no room for social liberation.

Hickey’s comments should be seen as reflective of a society where racism and white supremacy were not only commonplace but also embedded into the cultural DNA of the region. While the leaders and organizers of the BTW did not express these sentiments in the same way as Hickey, they accepted the logic of white supremacy and Jim Crow. The BTW would organize Black workers but consigned them to segregated locals. Despite this fact, it would be a mistake to assume that the question of race and white supremacy was settled in the initial foundation of the Brotherhood. The racial politics of the union would ebb and flow based on local conditions and the course of the struggle in the forests of East Texas and western Louisiana.

¹⁰³ Hickey, “Social Equality.”

¹⁰⁴ Hickey, “Social Equality.”

¹⁰⁵ Hickey, “Social Equality.”

CHAPTER IV

THE BROTHERHOOD OF TIMBER WORKERS IN LOUISIANA

Much of the history of the BTW occurred in the western Louisiana section of the Piney Woods. Taking advantage of a rich history of resistance to capital, the BTW spread rapidly across western Louisiana. As the union progressed and then retreated, a relatively conservative union would become more radical. A union that started with segregated locals would become fully integrated as white and black workers struggled side by side. Still, if an honest assessment of the union's racial policy is to be done, then one finds the union's standards to be lacking. Even at its most radical phase, the union failed to adequately address the issues that only affected black workers and focused on the struggle against the economic structure of the Piney Woods while largely neglecting the struggle against the social system (white supremacy) which bolstered the power of the region's elites. This chapter first briefly traces the history of the union in western Louisiana. It then focuses on the area of the union's policy that is usually touted by historians: its racial policy.

The Piney Woods of Louisiana, and the state as a whole, has a rich history of resistance to capital and the racial patriarchs that represented it. Not only did Louisiana have a history of organizing, but they also had a history of interracial organizing as well. In the 1870s and 1880s, the Knights of Labor attempted to organize the black field workers of Louisiana's "sugar bowl".¹⁰⁶ In 1877 and 1886, black field hands joined white

¹⁰⁶ James R. Green, *Grassroots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest 1895-1943* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 188.

workers and walked off their jobs.¹⁰⁷ Both strikes were summarily crushed by white militias, but these strikes showed that black workers could be organized. At the turn of the century, with the advent of the lumber industry, many of these same workers journeyed to the forests of western Louisiana in search of better wages.

What they would find was an industry that paid low wages for incredibly dangerous work. Southern lumber workers were paid from 15 to 25 percent below the national average for the industry, and they worked two hours longer per day.¹⁰⁸ After working a ten to twelve-hour shift, workers were paid a wage as low as \$1.25 for the day, or \$7 or \$9 a week.¹⁰⁹ Most often, workers were paid in company scrip, which could only be used outside of company stores at a discount of 5 to 30 percent.¹¹⁰ On top of incredibly expensive and dilapidated housing, workers were expected to pay \$1.00 to \$1.50 a month for compulsory medical insurance; workers had no choice in what doctor they saw and these “Doctors” often had dubious qualifications.¹¹¹ Still, the lumber companies would find ingenious ways to further strip their workers of their meager wages. Every lumber worker was required to purchase “accident insurance” provided by the lumber companies. Workers paid between seventy-five cents to a dollar a month, the lumber company then purchased casualty insurance for fifty to sixty cents per month and pocketed the rest.¹¹² Not satisfied with paying their workers poverty wages, employers managed to squeeze their workers further to make a profit.

It should be no wonder then that the forests of western Louisiana had a history of labor tension and struggle. The first attempts at organizing occurred in the late 1880s

¹⁰⁷ Green, 205.

¹⁰⁸ P. Foner, 234.

¹⁰⁹ P. Foner, 234.

¹¹⁰ P. Foner, 234.

¹¹¹ P. Foner, 235.

¹¹² P. Foner, 235.

under the leadership of the Knights of Labor, but they were ultimately unsuccessful.¹¹³ In 1902, more serious and sustained attempts at organization began. In that year, 600 mill workers at the Ruddock and Louisiana Cypress Sawmill Company went on strike.¹¹⁴ Mill workers in Lutcher, Louisiana joined as well, and a “black local” of the Socialist Party formed the following year.¹¹⁵ Sustained action at the Lutcher mill led to the adoption of a ten-hour day in place of the old eleven-hour day.¹¹⁶

Despite modest gains, these new labor organizations soon vanished. However, they helped to create a culture of organized resistance in Western Louisiana. This culture of resistance was most clearly seen in the autumn of 1907. In that year, the mill owners of the Piney Woods, citing the panic of 1907, decided to unilaterally cut wages across the board by 20 percent.¹¹⁷ In response, the lumber workers of East Texas and Western Louisiana, skilled and unskilled, black and white, spontaneously went on strike.¹¹⁸ This unplanned general strike closed hundreds of mills across the region and caused the lumber industry to nearly grind to a halt. Mill owners were forced to act. Mill owners promised that when economic conditions improved, wages would be returned to their previous level.¹¹⁹ This was enough to bring most of the striking workers back to the plant. While mill workers around De Ridder, Louisiana held out for several weeks, the strike eventually ended in failure: the lumber barons of the Piney Woods reneged on their prior promise to raise wages to their previous level.¹²⁰

¹¹³ P. Foner, 235.

¹¹⁴ Cook and Watson, 127.

¹¹⁵ Cook and Watson, 127.

¹¹⁶ Cook and Watson, 127.

¹¹⁷ P. Foner, 236.

¹¹⁸ P. Foner, 236.

¹¹⁹ P. Foner, 236.

¹²⁰ P. Foner, 236.

The threat to the power of the lumber barons was made plain by the general strike. To prevent future recurrences of strikes and organization, the owners organized themselves. In the wake of the general strike, they formed the SLOA.¹²¹ The *raison d'être* of the organization was the coordination of anti-union activities industry wide. The SLOA set to work immediately. Since the availability of cash was important in the organization of both unions and strikes, they immediately undertook measures to restrict cash flow in the Piney Woods; this was most effectively done by refusing the exchange of company script for cash at company stores.¹²² They also relied on the method that had worked so well in preventing black and white unity in the past: they consciously stoked racial tensions. One journalist stated that "The Lumber Trust carefully studies methods for antagonizing methods for intensifying race antagonism and then sits back to watch it work."¹²³ By employing both methods, the SLOA had (seemingly) crushed the nascent labor movement in the Piney Woods. A measure of this success can be seen by the fact that by 1910, due to the slowdown in labor activity, the SLOA had largely ceased to exist.¹²⁴

Labor peace would prove to be illusory. The region's workers had shown, through the general strike, which they were amenable to organizing and despite SLOA repression, socialists, and IWW members continued to agitate in the area. In the winter of 1910, Arthur Lee Emerson and Jay Smith would seek to do what so many others had tried to do

¹²¹ P. Foner, 236.

¹²² P. Foner, 236.

¹²³ P. Foner, 236.

¹²⁴ P. Foner, 236.

and failed: organize the lumbermen of the Piney Woods. Emerson and Smith founded the BTW in December 1910 in Carson, Louisiana.¹²⁵

Archival material tells us that Emerson and Smith were already well known. In an incendiary letter John Henry Kirby, the leader of the SLOA, wrote:

That man Emerson is a tin-horn gambler who has loafed about the mills in East Texas and West Louisiana for some years. He laid in jail at Lake Charles for some months on a charge of assault to murder and finally was released on the payment of a fine for aggravated assault, the injured party not appearing as a witness. He has worked occasionally at some of the mills but has never had steady employment...He is a student of Socialism and a man of mental attainments and thoroughly unscrupulous. His associate Jay Smith is a man pretty much of the same character but of limited education...He is a more desperate man and if left alone would apply the torch and commit any other act of infamy.¹²⁶

Despite these attacks, the BTW spread rapidly. Both Emerson and Smith were skillful organizers who traveled from camp to camp disguised as insurance agents or card sharks.¹²⁷ Through the winter of 1910 and 1911, Emerson, Smith and other BTW organizers traveled and recruited members throughout the Piney Woods. They were incredibly successful. On December 3, 1910, they organized the first local in Carson, Louisiana (near De Ridder).¹²⁸ Within a year, the organization had ballooned from ninety members to between twenty and twenty-five thousand.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Cook and Watson, 129.

¹²⁶ John Henry Kirby to the American Lumberman, 8 August 1911, John Henry Kirby Papers, Box 92, Folder 4, University of Houston Libraries Special Collections, MD Anderson Library.

¹²⁷ Cook and Watson, 129.

¹²⁸ P. Foner, 237.

¹²⁹ Cook and Watson, 129.

Rapid expansion led to the need for a formal organization with a constitution, by-laws, and dues structure. To that end, the union organized a general convention in June 1911 at Alexandria, Louisiana. At the convention, the union decided on a two-level organization with local units (known as “lodges”) composed of twenty-five or more members and a central organization (known as the “Grand Lodge”) composed of elected delegates from each local.¹³⁰ When the “Grand Lodge” was not in convention, a committee of salaried officials, including the newly elected President Emerson and Secretary Smith, would make pronouncements and act in the name of the Grand Lodge.¹³¹ Membership was relatively open. The union welcomed “all persons, regardless of vocation, who may be in sympathy with the labor movement, and who comply with the constitution, rules, and by-laws of the organization.”¹³² Exceptions were made for people who were employers in the lumber industry, and criminals.¹³³

From its earliest days, the BTW had been accused of being a radical association that was “rankly socialistic.”¹³⁴ However, when one looks at the union’s constitution, pronouncements, and actions, they see a relatively conservative union. For instance, while the union accepted black members, they bowed to the dictates and customs of southern society and created segregated locals called “colored lodges.”¹³⁵ Amazingly, these colored lodges were not allowed to keep initiation fees and dues, but were required to surrender them to the nearest white lodge.¹³⁶ Black leadership was confined to these colored lodges and black members were not allowed to be delegates at the national

¹³⁰ P. Foner, 237.

¹³¹ P. Foner, 237.

¹³² P. Foner, 237.

¹³³ P. Foner, 237.

¹³⁴ Letter to the American Lumberman, John Henry Kirby Papers.

¹³⁵ P. Foner, 237.

¹³⁶ P. Foner, 237.

convention or hold salaried leadership positions.¹³⁷ With these limitations in place, it is clear that, initially, black workers were not full members of the union.

The union was conservative in other ways as well. The union's constitution stressed limited objectives, recognized the rights of employers, and rejected all forms of violence.¹³⁸ In fact, in the union's early days they went to great lengths to distance themselves from radical organizations like the IWW. In a letter sent out to its members in August 1911, President Emerson wrote that while he respected the IWW "The question of affiliation with the I.W.W. was brought up at the meeting of the union in June. It was discussed from every angle, and, it was unanimously agreed that it was unwise."¹³⁹ Upon first glance, one might think the decision not to affiliate was merely a pragmatic decision, that it was not the right time for affiliation. Upon further reading, the reasons become clearer. Emerson writes that "It is not our purpose to make an attempt to reconstruct the social fabric. We must do one thing at a time. We must act with moderation, but with firmness. We are confronted with a condition, not a theory. We cannot succeed by alienating the sympathy of the great body of society."¹⁴⁰ What can be seen is a union that may have some radical members, but is, on the whole, not interested in a radical transformation of society. They were interested in the nuts and bolts of union rights: higher wages and better conditions. From these statements, one can see a union that is not interested in challenging (in a fundamental way) the oppressive systems found in their

¹³⁷ John Henry Kirby to A. J. Criner, 11 August 1911, John Henry Kirby Papers, Box 92, Folder 4, University of Houston Libraries Special Collections, MD Anderson Library.

While we do not know exactly where Kirby got this information, it can be surmised that, due to his extensive spy network, Kirby was aware of the union's by-laws and knowledgeable about the union's structure and practices.

¹³⁸ P. Foner, 238.

¹³⁹ Letter from the Office of the Grand President, 12 August 1911, Kirby Lumber Company Records, Box 197, Folder 1, East Texas Research Center at Stephen F. Austin University, Ralph W. Steen Library.

¹⁴⁰ Letter from the Office of The Grand President, Kirby.

society, whether it be the capitalist system or the system that defined and interacted with both the economic and social systems: white supremacy.

All of the union leadership's carefully crafted statements were for naught. The lumber operators classified the Brotherhood as a "socialistic" offshoot of the IWW that was interested in violent social change. To crush these "socialists," lumber operators would fight dirty. From the outset, individual mill owners employed the tried-and-true method of the lockout and the so-called yellow-dog contract.¹⁴¹ It soon became clear that if the lumber barons were going to crush the rapidly growing union, they needed to work together in a united front. The long dormant SLOA hastily reconvened in New Orleans in July 1911 and, after intense lobbying by SLOA leader John Henry Kirby, agreed that the operators would institute a policy of automatic lockouts for union "infected" mills.¹⁴² In what could be read as a warning to the wider region, union mills in the De Ridder area would be closed immediately and resulted in the lockout of three thousand workers.¹⁴³ The lockout policy would be applied to all mills beginning on August 7, in the meantime, it was agreed that all employees would either sign a yellow-dog contract or be fired.¹⁴⁴ By the eighth of August, one day after the general lockout was to take effect, workers were locked out from another three mills.¹⁴⁵ Locked out mills would become virtual warzones. According to the BTW affiliated newspaper *The Lumberjack*, armed guards were posted

¹⁴¹ A yellow-dog contract typically stated that a worker would be fired if they joined a union. Yellow-dog contracts were required of both new and current employees.

¹⁴² James E. Fickle, "The Louisiana-Texas Lumber War of 1911-1912," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, 16, 1 (Winter, 1975), 66.

¹⁴³ Fickle, 66.

¹⁴⁴ Fickle, 66.

¹⁴⁵ John Henry Kirby to E.P. Ripley, 8 August 1911, John Henry Kirby Papers, Box 92, Folder 4, University of Houston Libraries Special Collections, MD Anderson Library.

at all the gates, and scabs were virtually imprisoned within the mill; no one was allowed to leave or enter mill premises without a pass.¹⁴⁶

The pattern had been set for the next several months. When the SLOA got word of union activity, from either spies or mill managers, they would resort to a lockout. The BTW took advantage of the lockout to press their demands. Namely higher wages, shorter working hours, and recognition of the union for bargaining purposes.¹⁴⁷ Beyond these basic demands, the union also demanded payment in cash, the freedom to buy from independent stores, lower rents, lower medical fees, freedom of speech and assembly, camp improvements, and the removal of company guards. There is evidence that even in the early days of the lockouts, the lockouts themselves and the threats of termination were having some effect. In a letter to unions, members, the officers of the union stated that:

At this time the threats of being fired should have no terrors for any member, or prospective member, of this order. The cotton fields of the South, and particularly of Texas, are even now "white unto the harvest."...This being true why hesitate to join the union for fear of being discharged?...Do you not feel, and believe it possible, that your present condition could be improved?...Therefore organize. Stay organized. Hold fast to the Union, the organization through which, only, your present condition can be improved.¹⁴⁸

The appeals for solidarity and the knowledge that there was temporary work in other parts of the South seemed to work. The lockouts went on until February of the next

¹⁴⁶ "Peonage at Merryville," *The Lumberjack*, January 9, 1913.

¹⁴⁷ "Fight Labor Union," *The Times-Democrat*, July 20, 1911.

¹⁴⁸ Letter from the Grand Lodge, September 6, 1911, Kirby Lumber Company Records, Box 197, Folder 1, East Texas Research Center at Stephen F. Austin University, Ralph W. Steen Library.

year. While the union was not able to win many of their demands (including recognition), wages were raised slightly, and many mills switched to a ten-hour day.¹⁴⁹ Despite these gains, the lockout was very costly. At least a thousand members were blacklisted, and the union's membership had shrunk to five thousand dues-paying members (although ten to fifteen thousand non dues-paying supporters considered themselves "members").¹⁵⁰ The union's treasury was also exhausted.¹⁵¹

Despite all of these problems, the union had radicalized to an impressive degree. In April 1912, the union published a pamphlet *An Appeal to Timber and Lumber Workers*; Smith, the pamphlet's author, wrote that the purpose of the BTW was "the organization of all wage workers employed in and around the timber and lumber industry, into *One Big Union*, regardless of creed, color, or nationality."¹⁵² Smith also addressed the "negro question" by stating that

Either the whites organize with the negroes, or the bosses will organize the negroes against the whites, in which last case it hardly up to the whites to damn the 'niggers.'...the only hope of the workers is through industrial organization; that while the colors in question are two, the class in question is only one; that the first thing for a real workingman to do is to learn by a little study that he belongs to the working class, line up with the Brotherhood of Timber Workers or the Industrial Workers of the World, and make a start for industrial freedom.¹⁵³

The language used in the appeal stands in stark contrast to the Emerson's previous letter concerning IWW affiliation. How can this dramatic turnaround be explained?

¹⁴⁹ P. Foner, 243.

¹⁵⁰ P. Foner, 243.

¹⁵¹ Cook and Watson, 132.

¹⁵² Jay Smith, Quoted in P. Foner, 243.

¹⁵³ Jay Smith, Quoted in P. Foner, 243.

While there is not a document that explicitly explains why the union's leaders were pushing for affiliation with the IWW, one can surmise that the months of strikes and lockouts had changed the character of the struggle. While the union began with pretty basic bread and butter demands, the SLOA had refused to negotiate with the BTW. Instead, they resisted the union with all of the tools and resources at their disposal. The result of this struggle was intense: scores of members had lost their jobs, many were blacklisted, and conditions for union members had not changed dramatically. Affiliation with the IWW was a logical conclusion to a struggle that was now life and death. If the lumber barons refused to negotiate with the BTW, then the union would affiliate with a stronger national union that sought to remake society. Affiliation could bring new purpose to the union's work and (crucially) provide financial assistance to a union that was strapped for cash.

As could be expected based on the language of the *Appeal*, at the May 1912 convention of the BTW, the union formally voted to affiliate with the IWW. This vote changed both the political affiliation of the union and had immediate consequences on the union's day-to-day practices. In the immediate sense, affiliation meant two things. First, the union had completed its transformation from a rather conservative bread and butter issues focused organization to one that was thoroughly radical. Second, it meant that the union would become fully integrated since national IWW rules prohibited segregated locals. This would go into immediate effect as "Big Bill" Haywood, the national leader of the IWW, who came down to plead the case for affiliation, immediately invited the black members (who were meeting in another room) into the main hall of the convention.¹⁵⁴ In

¹⁵⁴ P. Foner, 244.

a general referendum in July, the rank and file members approved affiliation in a referendum by a large margin.¹⁵⁵ Thus, in 1912 the BTW became one of the few fully integrated organizations of the pre-Civil Rights era South.

Affiliation with the IWW brought both a renewed spirit of resistance and put a new target on the backs of the BTW's members. Within a few days of the convention, the union presented its demands to a few mills in the De Ridder area. When the union's demands were rejected, the workers at the mill summarily went on strike.¹⁵⁶ In response, the SLOA decided to call a general lockout, *throughout the entire industry*.¹⁵⁷ The general lockout signaled a ramping up of the lumber baron's efforts to crush the union. All known union members were blacklisted, workers seeking unemployment were forced to sign yellow-dog contracts, and scab labor was brought into the closed mills.¹⁵⁸ Physical terror was used as well. Gunmen and thugs hired and organized by the company began to break up union meetings and harass union members and sympathizers. The climax of this summer of terror occurred on July 7, 1912. A crowd that was gathered to hear Emerson speak was fired on in Grabow, Louisiana. Armed union members returned fire. When the smoke cleared, three men were dead and more than forty were wounded.¹⁵⁹

Emerson and sixty-three other union members and sympathizers were indicted for the murder of the company man who had died in the shootout. In response, the union organized demonstrations, solidarity associations, and raised money for Emerson's defense. When the trial was actually held, the prosecution's case was so weak that it took

¹⁵⁵ P. Foner, 245.

¹⁵⁶ P. Foner, 245.

¹⁵⁷ P. Foner, 245.

¹⁵⁸ P. Foner, 246.

¹⁵⁹ Cook and Watson, 136.

the jury less than an hour to return a “not-guilty” verdict for Emerson and his colleagues.¹⁶⁰ After the acquittal, the SLOA would continue its quest to crush the union.

Merryville, Louisiana was the site of one of the few mills that recognized the union. Ninety percent of the thirteen hundred workers at the American Lumber Company were members of the BTW.¹⁶¹ In October, the Santa Fe Railroad assumed control of the company and, in the next month, fired fifteen union members who had testified at the Grabow trial.¹⁶² The union millworkers immediately went on strike. The Merryville strike proved to be both the most “heroic” episode of the union’s existence and one of the final widescale actions of the Union. Over the next three months, there were impressive displays of solidarity between black and white workers, farmers and mill hands, and men and women.¹⁶³ While scores of black scabs were shipped in, many of them refused to cross the picket line once they realized what the strike was about and after being told about the cross-racial solidarity in the union.¹⁶⁴ Armed mobs and company gunmen would eventually do what the lockouts and scab labor couldn’t. On February 16, 1913, company gunmen and a mob of “good citizens” attacked the union camp, by February 19 the strikers had been cleared.¹⁶⁵ The dual strain of the Grabow trial and the Merryville riot would prove to be too much for the union. While there were a few more small-scale strikes, the union would be essentially dead by the middle of 1914.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁰ “Union Timber Workers Were Not Guilty,” *The Times*, November 3, 1912.

¹⁶¹ Cook and Watson, 138.

¹⁶² Cook and Watson, 138.

¹⁶³ Cook and Watson, 138. Unlike other unions, the BTW allowed non-workers to join as long as they supported the union’s cause. As such, both local merchants and women were allowed to join.

¹⁶⁴ Cook and Watson, 139.

¹⁶⁵ Cook and Watson, 139.

¹⁶⁶ Cook and Watson, 140.

When one reads traditional accounts of the union, they get the sense that many historians focus backwards. While the union ended as an integrated and radical union, it did not begin that way. Even at its most radical, the BTW had a gaping flaw that is usually touted as a strength by historians: its racial policy.

Through both its actions and pronouncements, the union chose to push “stomach equality” and refused to address the “particular condition” of black workers in the south.¹⁶⁷ In the words of *The Lumberjack* “Let all white MEN and Negro MEN get on the same side of this rotten old log and roll it over the *white trash* and *niggers*.”¹⁶⁸ The implication of this was that the immediate need of both white and black workers was to recognize that they were of the same class, and to fight the same enemy. This sublimation of racial strife was further emphasized in Smith’s *Appeal*. He stated that “the only hope of the workers is through industrial organization; that while the colors in question are two, the class in question is only one...”¹⁶⁹ This sublimation of racial antagonism seemed to go one way and, when pushed, the union’s leaders freely admitted that they were not in favor of racial equality. A month before Emerson’s *Appeal* was circulated, Emerson told a group of white workers and merchants that he did not need to be lectured on the issue of racial equality. After all, the mill owners were forcing the two races to mix.¹⁷⁰ He further informed the crowd that the BTW was not interested in disrupting the racist customs of the south. The BTW would “Give the negro his lodge room but let him be under the management of the white man.”¹⁷¹ Emerson did not express it as starkly and caustically as Tom Hickey had in *The Rebel*, but his comments above and the fact that the union did not

¹⁶⁷ Reich, 276.

¹⁶⁸ *The Lumberjack*, March 27, 1913.

¹⁶⁹ Foner Quoting Jay Smith, 243.

¹⁷⁰ Reich, 295.

¹⁷¹ Emerson, Quoted in Reich, 295.

address issues that only affected black workers leads the author to believe that they were essentially on the same side of the debate. The union had signaled, either directly or by omission, that they were not interested in the issues that *only* affected black workers. Namely, job discrimination and workplace violence. It is no wonder then that it was an outsider like “Big Bill” Haywood that was responsible for the integration of the union in its final days. Because of either, their own prejudice or a heightened sense of caution (probably both) the union’s leaders failed to fight the system that underpinned and strengthened the economic order that they were trying to overturn: white supremacy.

Should the union’s insistence on the primacy of “economic equality” over social equality be excused? After all, the union’s organizers were members of socialist organizations. Was not economic reductionism part and parcel of the tradition that these organizers belonged to? A brief review of Marxist literature and the statements of socialist organizations reveal that this is not the case. In his (widely published) letter to J. Bloch, Engels addresses the charge that that Marxism is based on economic reductionism. He states that:

According to the materialist conception of history, the *ultimately* determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. Other than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the *only* determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure — political forms of the class struggle and its results, to wit: constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc., juridical forms, and even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the participants, political, juristic,

philosophical theories, religious views and their further development into systems of dogmas — also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their *form*.¹⁷²

Engels flat out rejects economic determinism and states that other systems can shape historical struggles and deserve attention. The implications for this study are clear. Since the union's organizers were members of organizations that were heavily influenced by Marxist thought, it cannot be stated that they were unable to look beyond the economic determinism that they preached. In other words, it was in their intellectual wheelhouse.

Not only did the union's stance on social equality lack a theoretical basis, it also lacked a practical one as well. The BTW organized in states that were heavily affected by the Populist movement in the 1890s. In their attempt to gain black support, the Populists made both an economic appeal to black voters and tried to *address issues that either disproportionately or solely affected them*. Southern populists demanded an end to the convict-lease system, denounced lynching, and supported the inclusion of black men on juries.¹⁷³ They did not settle on making pronouncements either. Within their own organizations, they promoted black leadership. The founding conventions of the Populist parties of Texas and Louisiana included the full participation of elected black delegates.¹⁷⁴ Amazingly, the Texas convention elected two black members to the executive committee of the state party; the state committee of the party would continue to

¹⁷² Frederick Engels to J. Bloch, September 21, 1890, in *Marx-Engels Correspondence*, Transcr. Brian Baggins, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1890/letters/90_09_21.htm

¹⁷³ Barton C. Shaw, "The Populists After Dark," in *Problems in American Civilization: American Populism*, ed. William F. Holmes (Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Company, 1994), 136-137.

¹⁷⁴ Carl N. Degler, "Beyond Rhetoric," in *Problems in American Civilization: American Populism*, ed. William F. Holmes (Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Company, 1994), 130-131.

have black members until 1900.¹⁷⁵ The Populists were not heroes or anti-racist angels, they realized that if they were going to defeat the economic system that impoverished the members of both races, then they would have to attack the social system, which *underpinned and strengthened the economic system*. One could not go without the other, if they wanted black support, they would have to address black issues. This was the crux of the issue. The Populists terrified the South's leaders, because they knew that the Populists' appeal to ordinary people, both black and white, threatened a political and economic system that was shaped and strengthened by white supremacy. By not addressing black issues, the BTW failed to create the kind of cross-racial coalition that could threaten the power structure that opposed them.

This was, in the researcher's opinion, the greatest failure of the BTW. While the BTW is traditionally portrayed as a union that heroically stood up to the racialized capitalism of the Piney Woods, a careful analysis of the union's documents and actions reveal that this perception of the union is not grounded in reality. While the union went further in its racial policy than many southern organizations, they refused to confront the social system that bolstered the economic system: white supremacy. The union would face some of the same issues in Texas but in a different context. While white supremacy was a contributing factor to the union's defeat in East Texas, it would manifest itself in a different form entirely: paternalism.

¹⁷⁵ Degler, 131.

CHAPTER V

THE BROTHERHOOD OF TIMBER WORKERS IN TEXAS

When the observer shifts gear and looks to the BTW's other theater of operations, East Texas, something strikes out at them: the relative lack of activity. As stated in the previous chapter, much of the history of the BTW is the history of the union in Louisiana. When one looks at Texas, one does not see much of the massive strikes, lockouts, and running battles that happened on the other side of the Sabine.

Any objective account of the union's activity in East Texas must conclude that, compared to their comrades in Louisiana, the union had a relative lack of success in their organizing activity. What can explain this difference in outcomes? Were Texans more anti-union than the people of Louisiana? Were the Texas companies less exploitative? Upon careful examination, it becomes apparent that the reason for the union's failure in Texas can be chalked up to an unchallenged paternalist system, based on white supremacy. Unlike their comrades in Louisiana who were ultimately defeated by not adequately challenging the social system of white supremacy and by not addressing the concerns of black workers, the BTW in Texas was defeated by a paternalist system which had adapted to the new economic realities of the post-war South. In East Texas, John Henry Kirby, the dominant labor baron of the region, exercised an inordinate amount of power, which he used to crush the union. Kirby used these near-feudal powers to effectively defeat the union before it could establish itself.

One can hardly understand the story of the BTW without understanding John Henry Kirby. Rising from relatively humble means, Kirby rose to become the head of a

company that was not only the biggest lumber producer in Texas, but the entire South.

Kirby became a man of both great wealth and influence. He cast a great shadow over the forests of East Texas and, in his capacity as the head of the SLOA, would take a leading role in crushing the BTW. Kirby exercised a degree of power that few employers could: the pockets of East Texas that he controlled resembled feudal fiefs more than free counties.

Kirby was born into a family with deep pioneer roots. As land opened up, they went further and further west until his father settled on a farm in Tyler County, Texas before the Civil War.¹⁷⁶ It was on this farm that John Henry Kirby was born on November 16, 1860.¹⁷⁷ While Kirby's early life was marked by poverty, he was incredibly precocious. By the time he was sixteen, Kirby had attended every school within a six-mile radius of his home.¹⁷⁸ Kirby attended Southwestern University for a time using money that he had saved up by working as a sheriff's deputy in Tyler County.¹⁷⁹ After he was forced to quit school due to a lack of money, State Senator Bronson Cooper managed to get him a job working as a clerk for the Texas Legislature.¹⁸⁰ Kirby would keep this job for three years, all the while studying law under the supervision of Cooper.¹⁸¹ In 1885, Kirby passed the bar exam and set up a law practice in Woodville where most of his work consisted of land deals and buying timberland for clients.¹⁸²

After several years practicing law in Woodville, Kirby became acquainted with Nathaniel D. and George Z. Silsbee: northern capitalists who had investments in

¹⁷⁶ Maxwell and Baker, 99.

¹⁷⁷ Maxwell and Baker, 99.

¹⁷⁸ Maxwell and Baker, 99.

¹⁷⁹ Maxwell and Baker, 99.

¹⁸⁰ Maxwell and Baker, 99.

¹⁸¹ Maxwell and Baker, 99.

¹⁸² Maxwell and Baker, 99.

ranching.¹⁸³ Kirby convinced the pair that they would make more money in timber and, starting in 1893, the three would partner and invest in the virgin forests of Texas and Louisiana. The trio soon controlled two hundred and fifty thousand acres of virgin forests.¹⁸⁴

Like any good capitalist, Kirby diversified. In 1893, Kirby started building the Gulf, Beaumont, and Kansas City Railroad to connect the lumber operations of East Texas. The railroad expanded rapidly and was sold to the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway company in 1900.¹⁸⁵ This would be the start of a long relationship between Kirby and the Santa Fe.

While the timber industry of East Texas was profitable, it involved several small mill owners and operators who were often confined to a single mill site. Kirby realized that if the lumber industry could be concentrated in the same way that other industries (oil, steel, sugar, etc.) had then the profits of investors could be greatly expanded.¹⁸⁶ From the outset then, Kirby was hell bent on creating a monopoly in the forests of East Texas. In pursuit of this goal, Kirby, with the help of eastern bankers and attorneys, founded the Kirby Lumber Company in July 1901.¹⁸⁷ With a starting capitalization of ten million dollars the company expanded rapidly and would come to control twenty-five plants and would grow to a total capitalization of twenty-five million dollars.¹⁸⁸ By the next decade, Kirby became one of the wealthiest and most powerful lumbermen in the Southern United States.

¹⁸³ Maxwell and Baker, 100.

¹⁸⁴ Maxwell and Baker, 100.

¹⁸⁵ Maxwell and Baker, 100.

¹⁸⁶ Maxwell and Baker, 100.

¹⁸⁷ Maxwell and Baker, 100.

¹⁸⁸ Allen, 180.

One of Kirby's first actions as mill owner was to enact a shorter workday without a decrease in pay.¹⁸⁹ This early action gave Kirby the reputation of being "a friend of the worker," a reputation that Kirby accepted and was keen to cultivate.¹⁹⁰ Even when the company was having financial difficulties, Kirby made a point of donating to charities that were designed to aid his workers.¹⁹¹ Kirby did not stop at charity either, his company built housing and donated money to aid in the building of schools and churches.¹⁹²

Kirby also seemed to take a genuine interest in the lives of (at least some) of his workers. One of his letters in particular shows this interest. Kirby wrote to one of his managers:

A.J. Criner, the colored school teacher at Silsbee and a consistent and long time friend of mine, is uneasy lest his activity against the Brotherhood of Timber Workers should influence the school trustees against him. I wish you would see to it as far as you can that this act of his does not result to his disadvantage.¹⁹³

This letter shows us that not only was Kirby loyal to the people who either worked for or with him, he was also someone who had a great degree of power in the area that he operated. Kirby is a great example of paternalism, a policy that he explicitly promoted. Kirby was the heir of the great antebellum southern paternalists and he redefined that role for a new age. Kirby could and would do things to "take care of his people." Besides donating to charity, he could and would intervene to ensure that the people who helped him would be safe.

¹⁸⁹ Allen, 181.

¹⁹⁰ Allen, 181.

¹⁹¹ Gullet, 53.

¹⁹² Gullet, 55.

¹⁹³ John Henry Kirby to W. P. Mayo, August 13, 1911, John Henry Kirby Papers, Box 92, Folder 4, University of Houston Libraries Special Collections, MD Anderson Library.

There was another, darker side to this paternalism. While Kirby may have been willing to give his people crumbs, he expected near absolute power in return. Kirby did not just employ people in the region; he controlled nearly every aspect of their lives. He was able to do this because Texas mills, unlike their counterparts in Louisiana, were often located in company towns. The company exercised a monopolistic control on all business in these towns. Workers lived in company houses, bought their provisions in company stores, and were paid in company scrip.¹⁹⁴ Everyone that the lumber worker interacted with, the preacher, doctor, and schoolteacher were in one way or another tied to the company.¹⁹⁵ Company control was so complete that the Commission on Industrial relations found that the Kirby's towns lacked basic rights such as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom of the press.¹⁹⁶

Put simply, Kirby exercised a form of control that other employers could only dream of. Kirby had absolute control, including political control, of the regions where he operated. This political control was not merely limited to the backrooms. The Kirby Company controlled government jobs, including federal jobs, in their area. One letter from company executive states:

My information, from our operating department, is that there is a vacancy in the Postmastership at Evadale and that Mr. Sam Adams has made application for the Place and is about to receive the appointment. Evadale, as you know, is one of our

¹⁹⁴ Allen, 155.

¹⁹⁵ Allen, 155.

¹⁹⁶ Allen, 156.

mill points and as Mr. Adams is particularly Objectionable to us I want to urge that some other party be appointed.¹⁹⁷

This revealing letter shows Kirby's level of control. Not only did the company control local politics, they had enough power to decide who did and did not get federal jobs. Kirby's position combined the powers of the robber baron, political boss, and southern patriarch.

While Kirby did not literally own his workers, he did exercise an inordinate amount of control over their lives. Like all paternalist systems, including those founded on white supremacy, Kirby had a sense of obligation towards his workers, but in turn, he expected loyalty and a degree of control that resembles that exercised by the feudal lords of Europe. This degree of control was part and parcel of a system that was built on white supremacy. The old elites had managed to adapt and co-opt the new industrialists in their power system. Kirby wasn't the only member of this co-opted elite, but he was one of the most glaring examples. The last thing that Kirby needed, or wanted, was his workers organizing. Undoubtedly, he would have seen this as a slap in the face—his employees not fulfilling their end of the paternalist bargain. While Kirby claimed that he had no problem with craft unions, official records contradict this notion. In a letter to a Texas Congressman, B.F. Bonner, a Kirby company executive, wrote:

At the special session of the 62nd congress convening April 4th the American Federation of Labor will present, through its representatives, a great many measures affecting labor conditions...It is therefore very important that the committees handling such measures be composed of conservative men of high

¹⁹⁷ B.F. Bonner to Col. Cecil A. Lyon, May 2, 1911, Correspondence on Secret Service Men, Operatives, Applications 1911, Kirby Lumber Company Papers, Box 198, Folder 3, East Texas Research Center, Ralph W. Steen Library.

character, otherwise grave wrongs are apt to result. This is especially true at this time, when labor is making excessive demands in the way of conditions and remuneration...¹⁹⁸

Kirby could not stomach anyone challenging his power or profits, no matter how moderate their demands might be. No wonder then, that he claimed that, despite their relatively moderate demands, the BTW were “socialistic.”

The BTW would make their presence known in Texas during the spring of 1911. Correspondence between B.F. Bonner and mill managers shows that “the movement has met with more or less success in Louisiana and that recent efforts have been made to this end in Texas.”¹⁹⁹ Bonner goes on to say that “The leaders of the organizations are now among our mills.”²⁰⁰ He then asks the recipient of the letter, a mill manager, to investigate his mill to see if he can find any evidence of organizing.²⁰¹ The company response to the union’s presence in Texas was swift. The next day, Bonner sent a letter to a friend in Saint Louis “concerning the Thiel Detective Service Company of St. Louis, Missouri, both as to their responsibility and ability to accomplish results?”²⁰² It is clear that the company took the threat of the BTW very seriously, seriously enough to enquire into the hiring of gunmen and spies.

¹⁹⁸ B.F. Bonner to John M. Moore, March 30, 1911, Correspondence on Secret Service Men, Operatives, Applications 1911, Kirby Lumber Company Papers, Box 198, Folder 3, East Texas Research Center, Ralph W. Steen Library.

¹⁹⁹ B.F. Bonner to S.W. Henderson, April 3, 1911, Correspondence on Secret Service Men, Operatives, Applications 1911, Kirby Lumber Company Papers, Box 198, Folder 3, East Texas Research Center, Ralph W. Steen Library.

²⁰⁰ B.F. Bonner to S.W. Henderson.

²⁰¹ B.F. Bonner to S.W. Henderson.

²⁰² B.F. Bonner to Col. W.C. Nixon, April 4, 1911, Correspondence on Secret Service Men, Operatives, Applications 1911, Kirby Lumber Company Papers, Box 198, Folder 3, East Texas Research Center, Ralph W. Steen Library.

Information is critical to the success of any organizing attempt and it's equally important in the quest to crush attempts at organizing. The Kirby Lumber Company was always at an advantage when it came to intelligence. The Kirby Company papers are flush with reports from professional spies, company men, and informants reporting on the union's activities. In fact, it is sometimes shocking how easy it seems for company spies to get information. In one letter, a company spy named Ross Williams writes that:

Being quite well acquainted here in Kirbyville I had no trouble to get up against the Local organizers, Sherrit and Gillian. I showed them my card and organization papers and they did themselves proud in showing me courtesies. Later I met Lindsey, the chief organizer, but did not have much time with him. I spent two or three hours with Gillian, the local organizer, and feel confident that I got everything out of him that he knew.²⁰³

The spy then goes to talk about the state of the union in the Kirbyville area. He relates that the union is not as strong as the company men thought, and that they only had about twenty members in the area, information that was crucial in effectively countering the union's work.²⁰⁴ Williams' account is just one of many though. The Kirby Company records show that the company had a near perfect knowledge of the union's movements and activities in the area.

This information was put to good use. Once the company got word of organizing, they swiftly moved in and locked out the millworkers at the affected plant. Sometimes

²⁰³ Ross Williams to J.W. Lewis, September 10, 1911, Cultural Accounts, Poems related to labor organization 1911, Kirby Lumber Company Papers, Box 197, Folder 2, East Texas Research Center, Ralph W. Steen Library.

²⁰⁴ Ross Williams to J.W. Lewis.

the company would lock out workers at the mills even if they were not exactly sure that organizing was taking place. In one letter, B.F. Bonner writes that:

I rather think the closing down of two of our mills—Bronson and Roganville—will have a very wholesome effect. Although we had no signs of union men, there were three organizers in the neighborhood of Roganville and we considered that it would probably be well to close these two plants.²⁰⁵

Once the lockout ended, workers could expect to sign yellow-dog contracts, in which they promised they would not join the union. The penalty for violating the contract would be immediate termination. All known union members were blacklisted and were unable to work at company mills, a massive deterrent in a region where lumbering dominated the economy. The reader might be able to guess how they kept track of these workers: lists were compiled of workers who were fired for union activity and sent to the company's head office.²⁰⁶ Being put on this list effectively meant exile for the listed individual.

All of these methods proved to be incredibly successful. By the end of 1911, Bonner reported that “The labor situation in East Texas has been very quiet.”²⁰⁷ While a few lockouts and Grabow solidarity demonstrations occurred, the Texas branch of the union was largely dead. The suppression of the union in Texas showed the enduring power of southern paternalism which was birthed in white supremacy. The “Proto-Dorian Convention” had shown an incredible ability to adapt to the new economic circumstances of the post-war South. The new elites of the newly industrialized sections of the south

²⁰⁵ B.F. Bonner to W.W. Warren, August 22, 1911, Correspondence on Secret Service Men, Operatives, Applications 1911, Kirby Lumber Company Records, Box 198, Folder 3, East Texas Research Center, Ralph W. Steen Library.

²⁰⁶ List of Men Discharged from Camp #5 for being members of the Brotherhood of Timber Workers, ND, Kirby Lumber Company Records, Box 197, Folder 1, East Texas Research Center, Ralph W. Steen Library.

²⁰⁷ B.F. Bonner to W.W. Warren, December 23, 1911, Correspondence on Secret Service Men, Operatives, Applications 1911, Kirby Lumber Company Records, Box 198, Folder 3, East Texas Research Center, Ralph W. Steen Library.

would partner with the old elites to ensure both their power and preserve a system based on white supremacy which gave them nearly absolute power over southern society.

Kirby's power flowed from a paternalist system that could not recognize any intermediaries between those on the top of society (employers) and those at the bottom (employees). As such, Kirby used all of his power as a southern patriarch to crush and utterly defeat those who dared to challenge the economic and social system.

While the story of the union in western Louisiana is one of high drama that includes multiple strikes and lockouts, the story of the union in Texas is of a union crushed by the overwhelming paternalist powers of the South's new industrial masters. Kirby's victory shows the enduring power of a highly adaptive paternalist system based on white supremacy, and the ability of those at the top to utilize it to preserve their power.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Despite existing for only three and a half years, the BTW continues to fascinate both professional and amateur historians. Part of the reason for this is the fact that the union was one of the few integrated organizations in the South during the nadir of American race relations. Still, another reason for this fascination can be found in the (usually) romantic treatment that traditional labor historians have given to the BTW. However, if the union and its work is to be treated seriously, scholars must move on from narratives that do not critically analyze the union and its work. To do otherwise runs the risk of mythologizing the people who risked their livelihoods (and in some cases their lives) to create the union.

After critically analyzing the union's work, actions, and beliefs, one must conclude that white supremacy negatively impacted the union's organizing drives. This played itself out in different ways depending on the region. In western Louisiana, the union failed to adequately address the social system of white supremacy, which underlined and strengthened the economic system that oppressed the people they were trying to organize. They also failed to address the issues that only effected black workers. In this respect, they differed from the Populists who recognized that in order to effectively fight and defeat the economic system, they also had to fight the social and cultural system that legitimized the power of the region's elites: white supremacy. In Texas, the union failed to get off the ground. They could not prevail against the awesome power exercised by John Henry Kirby; power that stemmed from a paternalistic system

that was an outgrowth of white supremacy. In both instances, white supremacy (in different ways) proved to be an overriding factor in the union's defeat.

In a certain sense, the union was destined for failure. The union stood opposed to an economic and social system that created a false sense of equality (based on race) between the south's elites and its white working class. This system, which easily adapted to the new industrial realities of the postwar south, perpetuated a type of paternalism that gave awesome power to both the planter and new industrial elites.

The union is not entirely blameless though. Its leaders refused to address issues that only affected black workers and it only integrated at the insistence of the national leaders of the IWW. By focusing on "stomach equality" and failing to address black issues, the union failed to fight the social system that underpinned and strengthened the economic system that they were fighting against.

Giving an honest assessment of the union's positions on the race question does not detract from the importance of what they attempted to do. These were brave men and women who, for a time, proved to be an existential threat to the power and position of the lumber barons of the Piney Woods. Racism and white supremacy have long haunted the history of the labor movement in this country. By giving honest assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of past struggles, the people involved become fully dimensional, and one can learn from the mistakes that they made. Without addressing the role that racism and white supremacy has played, and continues to play, in our institutions and movements, the systems that continue to oppress working people of all races will never be defeated.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allen, Ruth Alice, *East Texas Lumber Workers: An Economic and Social Picture, 1870-1950*. Austin, University of Texas Press, 1961.
- Ayers, Edward L. *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Bonner, B.F. Letter to Col. Cecil A. Lyon. May 2, 1911. Correspondence on Secret Service Men, Operatives, Applications 1911. Kirby Lumber Company Papers, Box 198. Folder 3. East Texas Research Center, Ralph W. Steen Library.
- . Letter to Col. W.C. Nixon. April 4, 1911. Correspondence on Secret Service Men, Operatives, Applications 1911. Kirby Lumber Company Papers, Box 198. Folder 3. East Texas Research Center, Ralph W. Steen Library.
- . Letter to John M. Moore. March 30, 1911. Correspondence on Secret Service Men, Operatives, Applications 1911. Kirby Lumber Company Papers, Box 198. Folder 3. East Texas Research Center, Ralph W. Steen Library.
- . Letter to S.W. Henderson. April 3, 1911. Correspondence on Secret Service Men, Operatives, Applications 1911. Kirby Lumber Company Papers, Box 198. Folder 3. East Texas Research Center, Ralph W. Steen Library.
- . Letter to W.W. Warren. August 22, 1911. Correspondence on Secret Service Men, Operatives, Applications 1911. Kirby Lumber Company Records, Box 198. Folder 3. East Texas Research Center, Ralph W. Steen Library.
- . Letter to W.W. Warren. December 23, 1911. Correspondence on Secret Service Men, Operatives, Applications 1911. Kirby Lumber Company Records, Box 198. Folder 3. East Texas Research Center, Ralph W. Steen Library.
- Cash, W. J. *The Mind of the South*. New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1941.
- Cook, Bernard A., and James R. Watson. *Louisiana Labor, From Slavery to "Right-To-Work"*. Lanham, University Press of America, 1985.
- Davenport, Tim, ed. "Negro Resolution Adopted by Indianapolis Convention [Adopted August 1, 1901.]" The Socialist Party of America Document Download Page. Marxist Internet Archive, 2007.
<https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/parties/spusa/1901/0801-spa-negroresolution.pdf>
- Degler, Carl N. "Beyond Rhetoric." Essay. In *Problems in American Civilization: American Populism*, edited by William F. Holmes, 125-35. Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Company, 1994.

- Engels, Frederick. Letter to J. Bloch. September 21, 1890. in *Marx-Engels Correspondence*. Transcr. Brian Baggin. https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1890/letters/90_09_21.htm
- Fannin, Mark. *Labor's Promised Land: Radical Visions of Gender, Race, and Religion in the South*. Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 2003.
- Ferrel, Geoffrey. *The Brotherhood of Timber Workers and the Southern Lumber Trust, 1910-1914*, Austin , University of Texas Press, 1982.
- Fickle, James E. "The Louisiana-Texas Lumber War of 1911-1912." *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 16, no. 1 (1975): 59-85. <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/4231438>.
- "Fight Labor Union," *The Times-Democrat*, July 20, 1911.
- Foner, Eric. *A Short History of Reconstruction, 1863-1877*. New York, Harper and Row, 1990.
- Foner, Philip S. *History of The Labor Movement in The United States Volume IV: The Industrial Workers of The World, 1905-1917*. New York, International Publishers, 1965.
- Graham, Donald. *Red, White, and Black: An Interpretation of Ethnic and Racial Attitudes of Agrarian Radicals in Texas and Oklahoma, 1880-1920*. Regina, Sask.: University of Saskatchewan Press, 1973.
- Green, James R. *Grassroots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest 1895-1943*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1978.
- Gullet, Ryan Scott. *East Texas Theater of The Timber Wars 1910-1913: Kirby Lumber Company's War With The Brotherhood of Timber Workers*. Nacogdoches, Stephen F. Austin University Press, 2010.
- Hening, William W., ed. *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia from the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619*. Philadelphia, R. & W. & G. Bartow, 1823.
- Hickey, Tom A. "Social Equality," *The Rebel*, December 23, 1911.
- Hinson, R.Z. Interview by Faye Green and Alicia Hubbard. June 10, 1997. *Interview 1226*. Transcript, The United States Department of Agriculture National Forest Service collection, East Texas Research Center. Stephen F. Austin University.
- Imus, David A. *The Essential Geography of the USA*, scale. 1:4,000,000. Eugene, Imus Geographics, 2010.

- Kirby, John Henry. Letter to A. J. Criner. August 11, 1911. John Henry Kirby Papers, Box 92. Folder 4. University of Houston Libraries Special Collections, MD Anderson Library.
- . Letter to E.P. Ripley. August 8, 1911. John Henry Kirby Papers, Box 92. Folder 4. University of Houston Libraries Special Collections, MD Anderson Library.
- . Letter to The American Lumberman. August 8, 1911. John Henry Kirby Papers, Box 92. Folder 4. University of Houston Libraries Special Collections, MD Anderson Library.
- . Letter to W.P. Mayo. August 13, 1911. John Henry Kirby Papers, Box 92. Folder 4. University of Houston Libraries Special Collections, MD Anderson Library.
- Letter from the Office of the Grand President. August 12, 1911. Kirby Lumber Company Records, Box 197. Folder 1. East Texas Research Center at Stephen F. Austin University, Ralph W. Steen Library.
- Letter from the Grand Lodge. September 6, 1911. Kirby Lumber Company Records, Box 197. Folder 1. East Texas Research Center at Stephen F. Austin University, Ralph W. Steen Library.
- List of Men Discharged from Camp #5 for being members of the Brotherhood of Timber Workers. ND. Kirby Lumber Company Records, Box 197. Folder 1. East Texas Research Center at Stephen F. Austin University, Ralph W. Steen Library.
- Marx, Karl. "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte." Karl Marx 1852.
- Marx/Engels Internet Archive, 1999.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/>
- Maxwell, Robert S., and Robert D. Baker. *Sawdust Empire: the Texas Lumber Industry, 1830-1940*. College Station, Texas A&M University Press, 1983.
- Mosley, Luther. Interview by Faye Green. August 11, 1997. *Interview 1242*. Transcript. The United States Department of Agriculture National Forest Service collection, East Texas Research Center. Stephen F. Austin University.
- "Peonage at Merryville," *The Lumberjack*, January 9, 1913.
- Rawick, George P. *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community*. Westport, Greenwood Publishing Company, 1972.
- Reich, Steven A. *The Making of a Southern Sawmill World: Race, Class, and Transformation in The Piney Woods of East Texas, 1830-193*. Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1998.

Roediger, David R. *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working Class History*. New York, Verso, 1994.

Shaw, Barton C. "The Populists After Dark." In *Problems in American Civilization: American Populism*, edited by William F. Holmes, 135-44. Massachusetts, D.C. Heath and Company, 1994.

The Lumberjack, March 27, 1913.

"Union Timber Workers Onere Not Guilty," *The Times*, November 3, 1912.

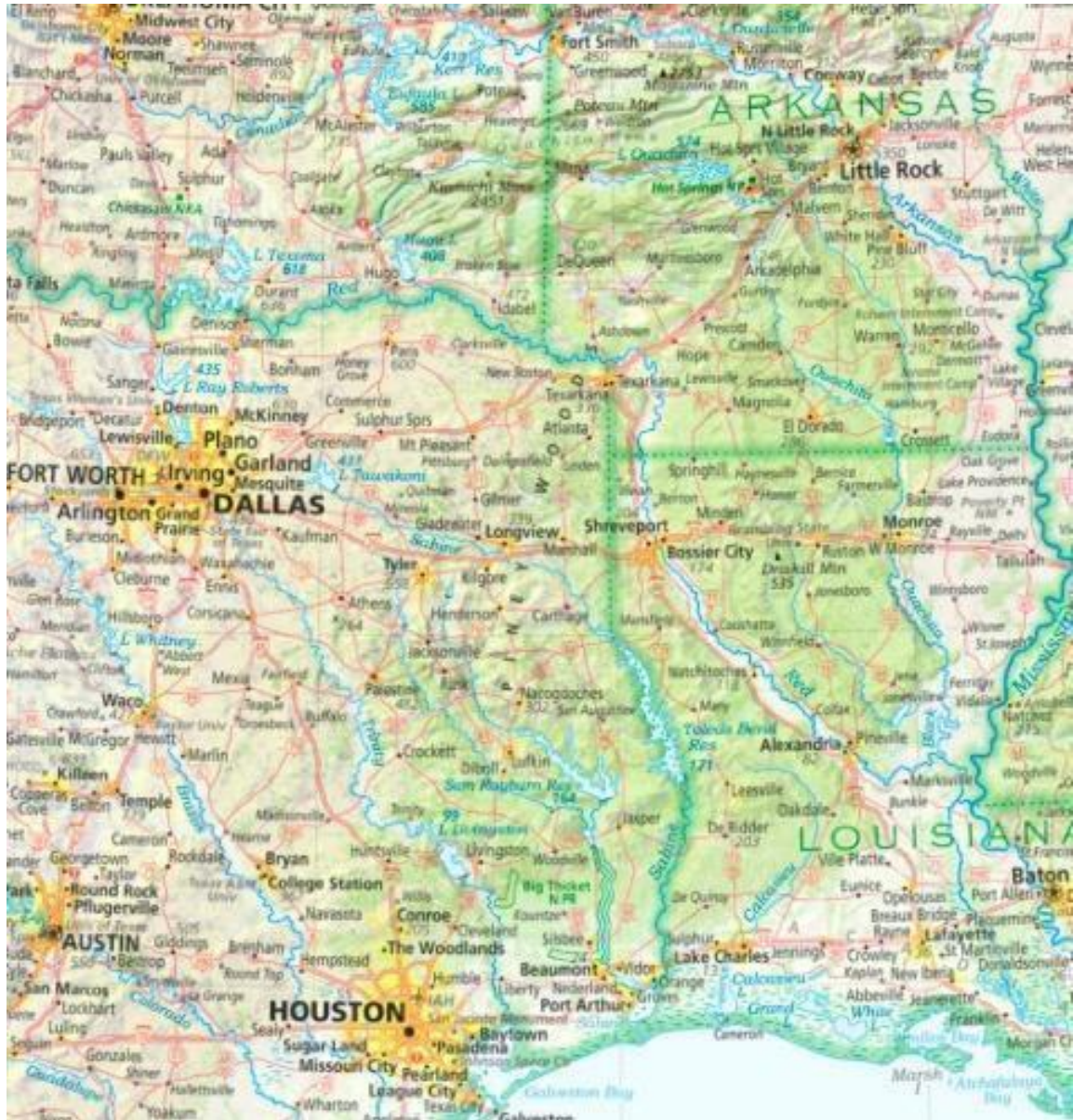
Williams, Ross. Letter to J.W. Lewis. September 10, 1911. Cultural Accounts, Poems related to labor organization 1911. Kirby Lumber Company Papers, Box 197. Folder 2. East Texas Research Center at Stephen F. Austin University, Ralph W. Steen Library.

Woodward, C. Vann. *Origins of the New South 1877-1913*. Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1951.

Wright, Gavin. *Old South, New South: Revolutions In The Southern Economy Since The Civil War*. New York, Basic Books, 1986.

Zinn, Howard. *A People's History of The United States*. New York, NY.: Harper, 2015.

APPENDIX A
MAP OF THE PINEY WOODS



Map of the Piney Woods region. The Piney Woods (the green section of the map) cover portions of Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. Courtesy of Dave Imus, 2010, from *The Essential Geography of The USA*.