

AFD Ep 453 Links and Notes - Thibodaux Massacre of 1887 [Bill] (guest Justin L) - Recording Dec 18, 2022

- **[Intro - Bill]** This week's episode is about the Thibodaux, Louisiana massacre of November 1887, during the Knights of Labor sugar plantations strike. This topic ties together a bunch of different themes we have explored in past episodes of the show. It marks a key moment in the decline and fall of the Knights of Labor, it highlights the difficulties of organizing workers in the post-Civil War American South, it demonstrates the monopolistic and brutal power of the sugar industry, and it serves as a reminder that (contrary to some later revisionism) late 19th century organized labor did make serious attempts to organize more than just white American workers or European immigrants, but that these efforts were beaten back with extreme, lethal force.
- **[Bill]** The Knights of Labor in 1887
 - As we've discussed in previous episodes, including most recently the railroad strikes of [1886](#) and [1888](#), the Knights of Labor's attempts to build a mass organization of working-class, union power in the United States since 1869 had suddenly taken off in the 1880s, only to crash back to earth. Membership grew from the low tens of thousands into the high hundreds of thousands and then evaporated almost as quickly, as defeats mounted and the organizations of capital worked to divide the working classes against themselves once again. Today, some of their historical composition and legacy is misrepresented. For example, even the opening paragraph of the Wikipedia article describes the organization as "the first mass organization of the white working class of the United States." In reality, the organization included Black workers in leadership positions and was making active efforts to organize Black workers in both mixed-racial industries (like the railroads) and Black Belt areas of the rural and urban South. As we'll see in today's context, the agricultural sector in Gulf Coast states like Louisiana was one area of focus, which makes sense because Louisiana was more Catholic than some parts of the South and the Knights of Labor on the whole tended to skew Catholic nationally. But by 1887, the Knights of Labor was on the down-swing again. The strikes they organized in Louisiana's sugar plantations were well-timed, well-planned, and well-organized. They focused on salient, narrow, and clear demands. Potentially this could have represented a promising new avenue for growing the organization and developing a wider struggle among American workers. Unfortunately, the strikes were violently suppressed and the Knights continued their downward spiral...
- **[Bill]** The Sugar Industry
 - In [episode 376](#) from May 2021, we discussed the refined sugar industry in the United States, which was arriving at a major turning point at the time of the plantation strikes in Louisiana. By 1887, almost the entire production of refined sugar in the United States was controlled by a single sugar trust: The Sugar Refineries Company, later known as the American Sugar Refinery Company. As we covered in that episode, according to "The American Sugar Refinery Company, 1887-1914: The Story of a Monopoly" by Richard Zerbe, *The Journal of Law and Economics* Volume 12, Number 2 Oct., 1969 (<https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/466672?journalCode=jle&>), the trust was not formed due to excessive competition and overproduction of refined sugar, but rather due to the beneficial economies of scale of the larger operations and their ability to adopt new and more profitable technologies faster because of their ability to muster more investment capital faster. The concentration of companies involved in sugar refining fell from 52 to 24 from 1867 to 1887.

- Refineries and the refined sugar trust represented the modern, industrialized side of the sugar business, but in fact – over the same period – there had also been consolidation and cartelization on the agricultural side at the raw sugarcane production level of the supply chain. Duncan F. Kenner, formerly the Confederacy’s leading envoy to Europe, was an ultra-wealthy Louisiana planter, worth millions at the time and also involved in cotton, had founded the Louisiana Sugar Producers Association (LSPA) back in 1877. This trade group represented the interests of the 200 largest sugar plantation owners in the state. This mattered a great deal on a national level because 95% of all non-imported US sugar was being grown in Louisiana in the mid-1870s, according to [a 2017 article in the Smithsonian Magazine](#). The LSPA was partly a lobbying group at the federal level and to the state government, seeking favorable trade policy or infrastructural investments in levees, and so on, but they were also a source of pooled funding toward research & development and a coordinating force for acting in unison to suppress wages and deprive workers of their rights. From [Wikipedia](#): *“They adopted a uniform pay scale and withheld 80 percent of the wages until the end of the harvest season, in order to keep workers on the plantations through the end of the season. They ended the “job” system. The largest planters, who maintained stores, required workers to accept pay in scrip, redeemable only at their stores.”* We will circle back to some of these points in a few minutes.
- Although Kenner died 10 years later, shortly before the strikes of 1887, it is worth zooming in on him to understand the situation the workers faced. As we discussed in [episode 358](#) in March 2021, one of the trends in Southern plantations, even before the American Civil War, had been consolidation and technologization, just like in the heavy industry. Sugar had been a particular point of interest for the early industrial revolution because of how much physical labor was required. Capital investments, like Kenner’s early sugarcane plantation railroad, later a staple of the sugar growing process, did not reduce the reliance on agricultural laborers, but instead dramatically increased the productivity and profits they could each be forced to produce, just like with the cotton gin. It is appropriate to say they were “forced” to produce these eye-watering economic gains for the landowners like Duncan Kenner, because he owned 600 slaves before the war, and he certainly figured out how to keep them toiling under their post-war status of theoretical freedom. Not even confiscation of his property and liberation of his slaves during the war, due to his high political status in the Confederate government, prevented him from regaining his plantation empire within a matter of years. Keeping ex-slaves working while freed seems to have been a particular specialty for Kenner because he was an early advocate inside the Confederate government for abolishing slavery as a diplomatic tactic to win the war, despite the entire purpose of the war being to preserve slavery, having apparently concluded that the official practice of slavery was not actually necessary to the operations of a savvy major plantation owner. Technology and new mechanisms of control could produce the same effective result...
- 1880s Gulf Coast sugar growers would have been, tariffs aside, in direct economic competition with nearby Cuba and to a lesser extent Puerto Rico, both at the time part of the Spanish Empire. This was one of the major battlefields in trade tariff policy in this period. But this competition was also often held up as an explanation for the seemingly never-ending insistence on lowering wages on American sugar plantations.

- Cuba had only abolished slavery the year before, in 1886. Some of the worst slavery conditions in the world had been an integral part of Cuba's sugar plantation economy for centuries, and the landowners replaced it with contracted immigrant labor that could be de facto treated as slaves anyway, with little ability to advocate for themselves. <https://library.brown.edu/collatoz/info.php?id=482> As in the United States, while industrial mechanization might have allowed sugar plantations to reduce their reliance on horrifically brutal forced labor by slaves or indentured workers, instead it merely allowed early adopters in agri-capitalism to extract more profits per worker. Obviously sugar was an integral part of the transatlantic triangle trade (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colonial_molasses_trade) since the start of the 1500s and relied heavily on some of the most intolerable slave conditions in the world, and that unfortunately continued in various countries. Cuba's sugar elite was noted for its enthusiastic adoption of new sugar technologies to get more profit out of its slave workforce and then their indentured workforce beginning in the late 1880s. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_sugar#Sugar_cultivation_in_the_New_World Again, it must be emphasized that after the abolition of slavery in the various sugar-producing countries of the world, slave labor on sugar plantations was generally immediately replaced by harsh indentured servitude that probably only barely qualifies as not being slavery and assumes a level of genuine understanding of contracts that many workers, especially colonized or subjugated populations, probably lacked when they signed. As we will discuss, it was certainly true in the United States that many nominally free workers had little choice but to remain in the sugar fields, whether they wished to or not. It was also already routine by this point for state governments to lease convict forced labor brigades, predominantly Black and usually imprisoned on trumped up charges, to plantation owners during harvest seasons, especially if there was any hint of the ostensibly free workers trying to exercise any power or resistance against the plantation owners. This was implemented under the exception clause of the 13th amendment, although it had been pioneered earlier in northern factories, as we explored in [episode 317](#). Some post-Civil War Southern prisons were literally built on the site of former plantations that had not been restored to their former private ownership.
- As a side note to further round out our contemporary context for the events of this episode, it is probably worth observing that 1887 was also the year of the Bayonet Constitution in the Kingdom of Hawaii where sugar plantation owners forced through a new constitution at gunpoint against the King, just a few years before completely overthrowing the monarchy and seeking US annexation https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1887_Constitution_of_the_Hawaiian_Kingdom
- **Justin** Mechanisms of control
 - Company Housing and Company Stores in Louisiana's sugar plantation region
 - In the decade since the LSPA had been established, sugar field workers and cane juice processors had fought back year after year against the plantation owners and their unfair labor practices and exploitations. One of the biggest objections was to the Company Store system. While Great Britain was busy continuing to pass [more and more laws](#) banning the use of [company scrip](#) and company stores, the United States was seeing it proliferate more than ever. In some industries, like mining and logging, the workers were pretty cut off from the rest of civilization and especially vulnerable to the abuse of being paid a small amount for their work in a company currency, token, or ticket that could only ever be redeemed at

an on-site store without outrageous prices, so that they could never take any wages off the site and into the real world. But in the South, agricultural workers were often fairly close to real towns with real stores and still they could often only receive pay in company scrip redeemable at company stores. This did not just keep them poor with no savings or ability to build wealth, and it did not just keep the money nominally used for wages within the corporation, but it also ensured a de facto state of serfdom since any money they earned could never be spent anywhere else. The best case scenario for company scrip would allow a worker to trade scrip for real money in some fashion, but this scrip was not exactly in high demand, so the exchange value would be pretty bad. In many cases, exchange for real money was simply not allowed. By 1887, the Knights of Labor had determined that this was probably the single most obvious and clear-cut issue they could organize plantation workers around, and this would become a central focus of the big strike. Agitating around the company scrip issue helped recruit thousands of new members to the KofL.

- Company housing was another problem for the workers in the Louisiana sugar plantation region. Obviously this was something a lot of workers across the US faced in this era, especially in the tent cities in mining country, which were always vulnerable to being cleared out if any workers tried to organize a walkout or any other action to advocate for themselves. But in plantation country, on-site company housing was also a direct legacy of the antebellum slave housing. Poor quality or ramshackle homes often located on the very sites of decades or centuries of horror and misery. Many families probably had never left in the nearly 25 years since Union occupation. Thibodaux's surrounding parishes, by the way, were explicitly excluded by name from the Emancipation Proclamation of 1862, despite being or in fact because they were already under northern military control. When the Louisiana Constitution of 1864 abolished slavery, the plantation owners with US Army consent immediately implemented a draconian system of one-year labor contracts and a serfdom-style prohibition on Freedom of Movement, according to a 2021 history article in the Lafayette Daily Advertiser.
<https://www.theadvertiser.com/story/news/local/2021/06/19/lincolns-laboratory-how-emancipation-spread-across-south-louisiana/7616911002/>
- [Justin] Debt as an instrument of control and servitude
 - The other way to keep supposedly free workers under control in an industry that relied upon incredibly harsh physical exploitation of workers was debt servitude. The company kept the books, both for payroll and company stores. They could advance paycheck money for a fee, offer pay-later store credit for a fee, and provide other loans to workers for a fee. Sometimes they would simply invent fees and debts, daring the worker to prove them liars and do something about it. Many agricultural workers had limited literacy, let alone legal representation. But even when the debts were not completely fabricated, they were constructed intentionally to be easy to fall into and impossible to escape from. Until these debts were repaid, a worker had to remain contracted to the plantation or risk imprisonment and probably ending up right back on the same plantation in chains anyway...

- It is worth noting that [sharecropping](#) was **not** a significant feature of Southern sugar plantations, unlike nearby cotton plantations, because as we have discussed the sugar industry favored consolidation of capital into fewer and fewer hands for economy of scale, whereas sharecropping – while a highly effective means of control of workers through debt and tenancy relationships – was more of a neo-feudal relationship that was viable with small outputs from individuals or families. Sugar plantations were striving to be bigger and more unified as modern, corporate entities with trapped wage laborers, as opposed to nominally semi-independent smallholders or tenant-farmers. Sugar plantations wanted standardized and regularized production, not everyone doing their own thing on their own parcels or plots. Equipment was owned by the company, not sold or rented to the workers, and [sugarcane is planted via stem cuttings](#) from existing stalks, not through seeds that could be sold to workers. Sugar workers were performing repetitive, uniform tasks, as if they were machines themselves, rather than assigning themselves work and figuring out how best to do it. In all of these senses, sugar plantation workers, although working outdoors in agriculture, were recognizably similar in position and daily life to the experiences of wage laborers in manufacturing factories, railroads, logging camps, and mountain mines all across the rest of the United States, and that made them a prime candidate for traditional union organizing ahead of tenant farmers, who would also later be organized by other groups. And it is also key to note that these sugar plantation workers were overwhelmingly Black, in the vicinity of 90%, which was not the case among sharecropping tenant-farmers, who very quickly came to absorb a significant number of poor-white farmers after the Civil War.
- **[Justin]** Narrative of the events of the 1887 strikes on major Louisiana sugar plantations and its violent suppression at Thibodaux and other nearby locations, which left at least 35 dead but likely more than twice that with possibly hundreds never accounted for...
 - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thibodaux_massacre
 - *In 1887 the Knights of Labor organized a major three-week sugar strike against cane plantations in Lafourche, Terrebonne, St. Mary, and Assumption parishes. Most plantations were idle. The strike was organized by the national Knights of Labor organization, who had established Local Assembly 8404 in Schriever the preceding year.*
 - The media in the area for White people quickly built a narrative that would be used to justify extraordinary lethal force being used to end the strikes: *A New Orleans newspaper reported that "for three weeks past the negro women of the town have been making threats to the effect that if the white men resorted to arms they would burn the town and [end] the lives of the white women and children with their cane knives."^[9] Similarly, in the days leading up to the climactic event in Thibodaux, it was reported that "[s]ome of the colored women made open threats against the people and the community, declaring that they would destroy any house in the town" and that "[n]ot a few of the negroes boasted that in case a fight was made they were fully prepared for it."^[10]*
 - *After the event, one Thibodaux newspaper repeated the claim that prior to November 23, "[t]he negroes were in motion [and] [t]heir women boasted that they were ready to fire the town."^[12] The white editor of the Lafourche Star*

newspaper (who participated in the killings^[3]) also offered this attempt at justification for the severity of the vigilante committee's response: *The loud-mouthed "wenches" must bear in mind that though they have a tongue, they are not privileged [sic] to make use of such threats as "burning the town," [""]slaughtering the whites from the cradle to the grave," etc.*^[13]

- In addition to the random innocent civilians or ordinary workers killed or wounded by paramilitary violence to suppress the strike, historian James K. Hogue, author of "Uncivil War: Five New Orleans Street Battles and the Rise and Fall of Radical Reconstruction," believes that Knights of Labor organizers were systematically targeted for disappearances and presumably murder and unmarked burial elsewhere...
- <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/thibodaux-massacre-left-60-african-americans-dead-and-spelled-end-unionized-farm-labor-south-decades-180967289/>
The November 21 2017 Smithsonian Magazine account of the narrative draws heavily from the book "The Thibodaux Massacre: Racial Violence and the 1887 Sugar Cane Labor Strike" by retired local journalist John DeSantis, who has spurred the organization of various memorial efforts and further research...
 - *Across the states of the former Confederacy, whites viewed organized labor as agitation that threatened the emerging Jim Crow order. Even in the North and Midwest, the Knights fought an uphill battle against authorities who sided with railroad and mine owners. Several states called out militias to break strikes during the late nineteenth century, but the Knights was at its peak of popularity in the 1880s.*
 - *[Sugar workers] had advantages that their counterparts in cotton areas lacked. Planters needed their labor, and growers living on thin margins failed to attract migrant laborers to replace local workers, especially in the crucial rolling season when the sugarcane needed to be cut and pressed in short order.*
 - *In Louisiana, the Knights organized sugar workers into seven locals of 100 to 150 members each. Hamp Keys joined former black leaders like ex-sheriff William Kennedy. In August of 1887, the Knights met with the St. Mary branch of the Louisiana Sugar Planters Association asking for improved wages. And again the growers refused. So the Knights raised the stakes in October of 1887 as the rolling season approached. Junius Bailey, a 29-year-old schoolteacher, served as local president in Terrebonne. His office sent a communique all over the region asking for \$1.25 a day cash wages, and local workers' committees followed up, going directly to growers with the same demand. But instead of bargaining, growers fired union members. Planters like future Supreme Court Chief Justice Edward Douglass White kicked workers off the land, ordering any who stayed arrested.*
 - *As the cane ripened, growers called on the governor to use muscle against the strikers. And Samuel D. McEnery, Democratic governor and former planter, obliged, calling for the assistance of several all-white Louisiana militias under the command of ex-Confederate General P. G. T. Beauregard. One group toted a .45 caliber Gatling gun--a hand-cranked machine gun--around two parishes before parking it in front of the Thibodaux courthouse. An army cannon was set up in front of the jail. Then the killings started. In St. Mary, the Attakapas Rangers joined a sheriff's posse facing down a group of black strikers. When one of the*

workers reached into a pocket, posse members opened fire on the crowd, "and four men were shot dead where they stood," a newspaper reported. Terror broke the strike in St. Mary Parish. In neighboring Terrebonne, some small growers came to the bargaining table, but larger planters hired strike-breakers from Vicksburg, Mississippi, 200 miles to the north, promising high wages and bringing them down on trains. The replacement workers were also African Americans, but they lacked experience in the canebrakes. As they arrived, militiamen evicted strikers. And Thibodaux, in Lafourche Parish, was becoming a refuge for displaced workers. Some moved into vacant houses in town, while others camped along bayous and roadsides. Reports circulated of African-American women gossiping about a planned riot. Violence broke out in nearby Lockport on Bayou Lafourche when Moses Pugh, a black worker, shot and wounded Richard Foret, a planter, in self-defense. A militia unit arrived and mounted a bayonet charge on gathered workers, firing a volley in the air.

- In Thibodaux, Lafourche Parish District Judge Taylor Beattie declared martial law. Despite being a Republican, Beattie was an ex-Confederate and White League member. He authorized local white vigilantes to barricade the town, identifying strikers and demanding passes from any African-American coming or going. And before dawn on Wednesday, the 23rd of November, pistol shots coming from a cornfield injured two white guards. The response was a massacre. "There were several companies of white men and they went around night and day shooting colored men who took part in the strike," said Reverend T. Jefferson Rhodes of the Moses Baptist Church in Thibodaux. Going from house to house, gunmen ordered Jack Conrad (a Union Civil War Veteran), his son Grant, and his brother-in-law Marcelin out of their house. Marcelin protested he was not a striker but was shot and killed anyway. As recounted in John DeSantis' book, Clarisse Conrad watched as her brother Grant "got behind a barrel and the white men got behind the house and shot him dead." Jack Conrad was shot several times in the arms and chest. He lived and later identified one of the attackers as his employer. One strike leader found in an attic was taken to the town common, told to run, and shot to pieces by a firing squad. An eyewitness told a newspaper that "no less than thirty-five negroes were killed outright," including old and young, men and women. "The negroes offered no resistance; they could not, as the killing was unexpected." Survivors took to the woods and swamps. Killings continued on plantations, and bodies were dumped in a site that became a landfill.
- Workers returned to the fields on growers' terms while whites cheered a Jim Crow victory.
- As mentioned earlier, there was a widespread propaganda campaign to create fear of purported Haitian Revolution-style massacres against Whites near the sugar plantations in order to justify extraordinary reprisals preemptively: *The Daily Picayune* blamed black unionizers for the violence, saying that they provoked white citizens, suggesting the strikers "would burn the town and end the lives of the white women and children with their cane knives." Flipping the narrative, the paper argued, "It was no longer a question of against labor, but one of law-abiding citizens against assassins."

- This was unsuccessfully countered by more sympathetic media accounts elsewhere: *“Do the workingmen of the country understand the significance of this movement?” asked Washington D.C.’s National Republican, pointing out that sugar workers were “forced to work at starvation wages, in the richest spot under the American flag.” If forced back to the fields at gunpoint, no wage worker was safe from employer intimidation.*
- *The union died with the strikers, and the assassins went unpunished. There was no federal inquiry, and even the coroner’s inquest refused to point a finger at the murderers. Sugar planter Andrew Price was among the attackers that morning. He won a seat in Congress the next year.*
- There were also likely extensive fatalities, in nearby Pattersonville, Louisiana, (today Patterson, St. Mary Parish)
- Recent commemorations and ongoing official searches for mass graves:
 - [Justin] <https://www.wdsu.com/article/thibodaux-massacre-descendants-dark-hidden-history/38524593>
 - *A former newspaper reporter for the Times of Houma-Thibodaux who authored a 2016 book about the killings, “The Thibodaux Massacre: Racial Violence and the 1887 Sugar Cane Labor Strike,” put an estimate of the actual number of dead at 30 to 60. “On the conservative side,” DeSantis said, elaborating on his estimate over a virtual interview from his home in New York state. He spent over a decade asking questions and collecting documents, aided by an archivist at Nichols State University. But DeSantis said his work only scratches the surface. He said others have put the death toll over 100. But those eight names are the only victims for whom concrete evidence of their deaths in the violence that erupted over a labor strike by sugar cane workers who were seeking just over \$1 a day.*
 - *“In October of 1887. They laid down their tools, we said, we’re not going to cut your cane anymore. And they began a strike,” DeSantis said. Louisiana Gov. Samuel McEnery sent the state’s all-white militia, and a local judge ordered evictions for the sharecroppers. A vigilance committee formed, “who vowed to protect people,” from the Black workers who had organized the strike, DeSantis said. After two white vigilantes were wounded by gunfire, DeSantis said, word among the white people spread of an “uprising.” “That’s when they began going door to door and, you know, hauling people out that they thought were leaders of the strike,” he said. “They began shooting people, they began killing people.”*
 - [Justin] <https://www.houmatoday.com/story/news/2017/11/11/lafourche-to-honor-families-victims-of-thibodaux-massacre/17081507007/>
 - [Nov 2017] *Lafourche Parish Councilman Jerry Jones plans to present a city proclamation to the families and is also asking that Lafourche residents hold a moment of silence at noon Nov. 23 in honor of the estimated 30-60 victims of the massacre.*
 - *According to DeSantis, Louisiana’s Lt. Gov. Clay Knobloch had been head of the Lafourche Parish militia, which was involved in the killings.*
 - *The city of Thibodaux made a similar proclamation on Sept. 5.*
 - [Bill] https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/diverse-group-honoring-victims-

[of-1887-thibodaux-massacre-that-targeted-every-black-person-in-sight/article_1b7bee94-3680-11e7-a190-47d27de96fdb.html](https://www.wvltv.com/article/news/local/searching-for-mass-grave-of-victims-in-1887-racial-massacre/289-552932011) [May 2017] Descendants of victims of a racial massacre 130 years ago in south Louisiana and descendants of Confederate and plantation families are working together to honor those victims and possibly find their remains. Members of white mobs went door to door for more than two hours, shooting unarmed blacks, on Nov. 23, 1887. The violence ended a monthlong strike by sugar plantation field hands, including many former slaves as well as some whites. Though records are sketchy, they indicate that 30 to 60 people died in the Thibodaux Massacre, said John DeSantis, whose book about the incident was published late last year. Local tradition holds that there's a mass grave on the grounds of what's now a black American Legion chapter. DeSantis and others created the Louisiana 1887 Memorial Committee to raise money for an archaeological survey to learn if that's true — and, if it is, have any remains exhumed, investigated, and buried in consecrated ground. The public was invited to the group's first meeting Thursday night in Thibodaux. The 19 to 20 members include a descendant of Jack Conrad, who was shot four times and left for dead, and at least one descendant of a local plantation family, DeSantis said. [...] The only investigation of the incident wasn't an attempt to bring anyone to task: it was a query in Washington into whether Jack Conrad's wounds entitled him to a pension as a veteran of U.S. Colored Troops. DeSantis said testimony from that investigation, found last year in the National Archives, "confirms they were shooting every black person in sight and they were pulling people out of houses."

- [Justin]

<https://www.wvltv.com/article/news/local/searching-for-mass-grave-of-victims-in-1887-racial-massacre/289-552932011> [March 2018] A patch of ground in southern Louisiana is being surveyed to see if it may hold a mass grave from a Reconstruction-era racial massacre. Davette Gadison is a graduate student who has worked on mass graves. She will check the area in Thibodaux on Thursday and Friday, using ground-penetrating radar and limited coring. Those could indicate whether digging would likely turn up a mass grave where white mobs are said to have dumped the bodies of African-Americans they killed in 1887. [Sept 2018]

<https://tulanian.tulane.edu/september-2018/earth-beneath-dump-site-offers-clues-to-racial-massacre> This spring [2018], however, Gadison, a Tulane School of Liberal Arts graduate student in the Department of Anthropology, stayed right here in southeast Louisiana. Using ground-penetrating radar, she surveyed a site in Thibodaux where a sugarcane labor strike was halted on Nov. 23, 1887. White vigilantes had rounded up striking African-American workers, killing many of them. Estimates of the number of workers who were murdered range from 30 to 60. The bodies were thrown into one grave; in the decades following the event the site became the city dump, Gadison said. [...] Now Gadison is a consultant on the [history recovery] project, working with a professor from the University of Louisiana–Lafayette to decide the next step. From her pending report based on analysis of the ground-penetrating radar survey, Gadison will recommend if, where and how to excavate. [...] While surveying the Thibodaux site in May, Gadison visited a barbershop next to the American Legion building located near the site. The barber told Gadison that he'd heard for years older people talk about the killing event, which apparently took place in a span of two and a half hours. "But he didn't realize that it was actually real. That it really happened." <https://www.houmatimes.com/news/scientists-release-initial-massacre-site-result>

[s/](#) [Oct 2018] *The “area of interest” is what has been described by Gadison as an “anomaly,” meaning it could indicate a burial site, although that is not certain. The report prepared by the scientists states that further investigation should involve not only archeology but also further historical and ethnographic research. [...] “Comprehensive archival and ethnographic research should precede any additional remote sensing or fieldwork. Such archival and ethnographic research could provide additional historical context and more detailed land use information that would greatly facilitate the fieldwork.” Recommendations for additional investigation of the Raymond Stafford Post property include further geophysical remote sensing, expanding the survey area to the north and if possible, to the west and south, behind the post building. Test excavations of areas of interest are recommended, the report says. Although manual coring was performed in May, the report does not recommend further exploration of that type. “Exploratory test trenches might be placed directly over subsurface anomalies, while systematic test trenches might be excavated along transects oriented from north to south and east to west across the field,” the report says. “Due to the possibility of encountering human remains, excavations should be preceded by consultations with descendants and community members, as well as an application for an Unmarked Burials Permit, in accordance with the Louisiana Unmarked Human Burial Sites Preservation Act.” [...] “That the location of a dump coincides with a place believed to contain a mass burial from the systematic killing of black sugarcane workers is probably not coincidental,” the report concludes. “Whether intentional or unplanned, the concealment of graves is characteristic of attempts to cover up mass murders and crimes against humanity. While this is not evidence of a mass burial, it is consistent with the silencing of a violent and loathsome event in Louisiana history.”*

- (More info:

<https://www.houmatoday.com/story/news/local/2018/10/20/thibodaux-massacre-mass-grave-findings-to-be-revealed/9503804007/>)

- [Bill] Concluding note: Despite the great difficulties of organizing workers in the Deep South in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and despite the decline of the Knights of Labor, the bloody defeat at Thibodaux was far from the last attempt to advance the cause of the workers in the region. In [episode 384](#), which Justin was also a guest on in June 2021, we discussed the far more successful (and even more cross-racial) New Orleans General Strike of 1892. In 1908 and 1920 – as we covered in [episode 383](#), the week before – there were racially integrated mine strikes in Alabama, again featuring the deployment of lethal state force, especially to clear strikers from company property where they had been living while working in the mines.