



planters. The workers wanted elimination of scrip, a small increase in their daily wages, and payment every two weeks. The planter's association rejected the demands. The planter aristocracy ruled Louisiana at this point in time. They worked for many years to deny poor whites and blacks access to education, and better working conditions. They were not about to cede any of their power now.

The Knights of Labor scheduled a strike to commence on the 1st of November 1887. The strike began during the crucial harvest period known as "grinding." On November 1st workers in St. Mary, Lafourche, and Terrebonne parishes refused to work, and refused to vacate their cabins that were plantation-owned. Attempts to evict tenants by local sheriffs were unsuccessful. The sugar planters were faced with the possibility of losing their crops to a freeze if the strike persisted. On the same day the strike began, the planters association called on the governor to send them help in the form of the state militia. Governor McEnery (1881-1888) who was himself a plantation owner had no problem in ordering the state militia to the embattled region. The first militia companies arrived in Schriever, Louisiana from New Orleans on the first of November. They made the short trip to Thibodaux where they intended to store their equipment which included horses, rifles, and a Gatling gun in front of the Lafourche parish courthouse. The courthouse is a beautiful antebellum Greek Revival structure which still serves as the parish courthouse to this day.

The two militia companies that arrived in Thibodaux were not the only ones to take part in strike-breaking. Other companies were sent to Houma and Lockport. Some 10,000 plantation workers took part in the strike. Most of the strikers were black, but nearly 1000 were white.

The militia companies sent to the region worked with local judges in evicting strikers from plantations, and provided protection for "scabs" sent in to replace the strikers. When striking plantation workers were faced with soldiers armed with Springfield rifles they offered little to no resistance. They heeded the orders to leave the plantations. Many congregated in the black section of Thibodaux.

Problems arose when white scabs were fired upon in Terrebonne parish. Strikers, who were forced off plantations, were believed to be involved in firing into sugar mills in Lafourche parish.

Pickets were placed in around the city of Thibodaux. The "pickets" were composed of white civilians from Thibodaux, and neighboring parishes. They were no doubt horrified by the rumor spreading around town that black strikers intended to burn the city down.

The struggle came to a head when two white picketers were fired upon while at their posts in a black section of town. The two picketers survived, but the incident enraged the white population of Thibodaux. White vigilantes rode through the neighborhood firing their weapons and wreaking havoc. The strike had degenerated into a race war.

Striker's and their family members were rounded up by vigilantes. Many were told to "run for their lives", before being summarily executed. On the morning of November 23, 1887 anywhere between 30 to 300 black strikers were killed. A company of militiamen known as the Shreveport Guards is considered to have taken place in the massacre. Another attempt to organize sugar cane workers in southeast Louisiana would not occur until the 1950's.

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