



The Colfax Massacre: The Untold Story of Black Power, White Terror, and the Death of Reconstruction

LeeAnna Keith

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On Easter Sunday, 1873, in the tiny hamlet of Colfax, Louisiana, more than 150 members of an all-black Republican militia, defending the town's courthouse, were slain by an armed force of rampaging white supremacists. The most deadly incident of racial violence of the Reconstruction era, the Colfax Massacre unleashed a reign of terror that all but extinguished the campaign for racial equality. LeeAnna Keith's *The Colfax Massacre* is the first full-length book to tell the history of this decisive event. Drawing on a huge body of documents, including eyewitness accounts of the massacre, as well as newly discovered evidence from the site itself, Keith explores the racial tensions that led to the fateful encounter, during which surrendering blacks were mercilessly slaughtered, and the reverberations this message of terror sent throughout the South. Keith also recounts the heroic attempts by U.S. Attorney J.R. Beckwith to bring the killers to justice and the many legal issues raised by the massacre. In 1875, disregarding the poignant testimony of 300 witnesses, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously in *U.S. v. Cruikshank* to overturn a lower court conviction of eight conspirators. This decision virtually nullified the Ku Klux Klan Enforcement Acts of 1870 and 1871--which had made federal offenses of a variety of acts to intimidate voters and officeholders--and cleared the way for the Jim Crow era. If there was a single historical moment that effectively killed Reconstruction and erased the gains blacks had made since the civil war, it was the day of the Colfax Massacre. LeeAnna Keith gives readers both a gripping narrative account of that portentous day and a nuanced historical analysis of its far-reaching repercussions.

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