

Schriever, LA & the Thibodaux Massacre

Travel back in time and visualize yourself as the head of a household, with a job working in the sugarcane fields... earning wages well below the poverty line and only redeemable in the form of a company store coupon.

Schriever, LA witnessed brutal labor disputes between black sugar cane workers and the powerful Louisiana Sugar Producers Association. The demands for change by the distraught workers caused a racial divide amongst the locals within the community and resulted in a catastrophe, known today as the Thibodaux Massacre of 1887.

In 1885, the Knights of Labor organized the railroad workers, and then the union established a local assembly in Schriever for sugarcane workers in 1886. This particular union was unusual during this period in time because it allowed both black and white members to join.

Most of the sugarcane workers were paid approximately thirteen dollars a month in the form of a script. The script was a redeemable coupon which only allowed the workers to buy products from company stores. Eventually, the enraged sugarcane workers demanded elimination of the payment script, increased wages, and a two-week pay period. The Producers Association was unwilling to negotiate, so in 1887 the Knights of Labor Union staged a strike involving 10,000 workers.

The workers refused to work or to leave their cabins on the sugarcane plantations. The Louisiana Sugar Producers Association enlisted the help of the governor who used scare tactics implemented by the military to force the workers off the plantations. Many of the workers fled to the black section of Thibodaux for safety.

The uproar spread confusion throughout the community as white civilians believed that black sugarcane workers were responsible for shots fired into a sugar mill, in the white section of town after the strike. Rumors spread that blacks were planning to burn the town. White civilians retaliated by firing shots into the black section of town. The families of the workers were rounded up and instructed to run for their lives, and the resulting pandemonium resulted in the death of thirty to 300 black workers. The Thibodaux Massacre is remembered as a brief and tragic struggle for human rights.

Source(s):

Hoffman, Eva J. "A Guidebook to Amtrak's Sunset Limited." Flashing Yellow Guidebooks, Golden, CO, 2009.

<http://libcom.org/library/us-thibodaux-massacre-1887>

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