

"Capturing Cotton's Metropolis: The Struggle for Political Control of Memphis Government, 1865-1900"

By Jeannie Whayne

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AUTHOR

As the cotton plantation South spread west into Mississippi, Tennessee, and Arkansas in the late antebellum period, the town of Memphis became a major trading center and the largest inland cotton market in America.¹ Responding to the need for labor along the waterfront, Irish immigrants from the potato famine flocked to Memphis and into a section of the first Ward called "Pinch" in north Memphis where the navy yard and the port facilities existed. By 1860, the Irish constituted 52.7% percent of that ward, but that would be their high point. By 1900 their numbers had dropped drastically, and they had been replaced by African Americans laborers. During the Civil War, thousands of African Americans sought safety and opportunity within the confines of the city, which had surrendered to Union forces in 1862, and while the majority of them settled in south Memphis near Fort Pickering, a sizeable proportion took up residence in Pinch. In the immediate post-Civil War period,

both the Irish and the African Americans were essential to the movement of cotton onto the world market and, indeed, the cotton economy was an ever present force in the life of the city.

Between 1850 and 1900, the population in the cotton producing counties in the Memphis region expanded dramatically and cotton production figures increased from just under 100 million pounds of cotton to nearly 366 million pounds in that period (see Tables I, II, III, and IV).

This paper examines the demographic revolution that took place in the city in this period but particularly in the old first Ward (see Tables V, VI, VII and VIII).² The movement of Irish and African American migrant groups into Memphis contributed to the development of racial tensions but also made possible an alliance across racial and ethnic lines after the Civil War. The notorious race riot of 1866 - which occurred in south Memphis (not Pinch) -- has been characterized by some scholars as collision between the Irish and African American working class, vying with each other over the lowest level jobs. Recent historiography has refined that perspective, but, in any case, these same two groups collaborated to elect an Irish mayor in the 1870s and challenged the white "redeemer" Democrats for political control of the city. Although the African American/Irish alliance was fragile, it maintained itself until

a devastating yellow fever epidemic gave a particular set of set of white elites -- the cotton elite³ -- the opportunity to seize control of city government.⁴

Black and Irish political participation was important for a number of reasons in the city, particularly the dispensing of patronage and the extension of city services into impoverished areas like Pinch in north Memphis and the predominantly black areas of the city in South Memphis like Beale Street. The control of the city government was important to cotton elites for a host of reasons, including a serious financial problem facing the city because of debts incurred in the antebellum period. The growth of the population during and after the war, occurring at a time when Memphis was ill-positioned to accommodate the newcomers in terms of infrastructure improvements, did nothing to improve the city's fiscal health. But another pressing matter was of even greater concern to the cotton elite than providing services to the laboring classes. They faced a number of serious environmental challenges to the waterfront, a result of damages from floods that threatened to undermine the city's cotton marketing infrastructure. They would eventually influence the Army Corps of Engineers to assist in securing funds from Congress in order to remedy the

situation. Nothing could be allowed to interrupt the flow of cotton through the Memphis port.

While these environmental and political forces were rocking the city of Memphis, the demographic makeup was transforming. Between 1860 and 1900, the number of people living in Memphis rose and fell precipitously - and then rose again - and its ethnic and racial makeup shifted within the city and within the Pinch district.⁵ The population decline was in response to the 1878 yellow fever epidemic while the increase in population, before and after the epidemic, was the result of the expansion of cotton production in the Memphis market area, an expansion that necessitated a greater number of cotton industry laborers and dock workers. While Irish migrants came by the thousands in the antebellum period, African Americans increasingly filled this need after the Civil War and became essential to the movement of cotton. By the end of the century, Ward One would become one of the predominantly black wards, and the Irish still living there would have achieved a greater level of occupational mobility than that of the African Americans. Always in the background, however, was the cotton economy. Its demands fed the growth in the black population and its rewards undergirded the occupational mobility of the Irish. As the contract labor system launched during the war gave way to the pernicious

sharecropping and tenancy arrangement -- another kind of unfree labor system -- blacks dissatisfied with the opportunities open to them on the plantations moved into Memphis.⁶

Memphis' future as a great steamboat capital was sealed after a treaty negotiated in May 1834 removed the Chickasaw from northern Mississippi. The lands they occupied were keenly sought after for cotton production, and their exploitation would feed the growth of the cotton economy throughout the antebellum period.⁷ The 1850s were particularly propitious as cotton prices rose more than fifty percent, and cotton production in the Memphis market area increased by greater than 140 million pounds. Even as more acreage was devoted to the crop, jobs opened up along the Memphis wharf, not to mention in the construction and railroad industries spurred on by the cotton boom. Irish immigrants flocked into antebellum Memphis to take advantage of these opportunities, and most of them initially settled along the waterfront in the first Ward. By 1860 80.6 percent of them occupied the lowest level jobs available.⁸

Although the area known as "Pinch" in the old first Ward existed prior to the Irish arrival and had already become notorious for criminal behavior, nativist sentiments expressed by members of the Whig and then the Know Nothing Party in the

1850s, attributed much of the illegal behavior there to the Irish. The Irish established secret societies to combat the nativists and formed labor unions and joined strike actions to protest against appalling work conditions. Neither of these developments endeared them to the Memphis business elite who refused to extend city services to the old ward.⁹ To complicate matters for the lives of the Irish, environmental conditions in Pinch were harsh. Low lying areas flooded, particularly along the filthy Bayou Gayosa, which, when not flooding was a stagnant pool better at breeding mosquitoes that carried malaria and yellow fever than supplying a safe supply of drinking water. In any case, Memphis funded few city services - water and sewage facilities - and most of those that were constructed were done by private businesses in the business district so did not serve the Irish in Pinch.¹⁰

When the Civil War broke out, some Irish formed Confederate units like the Emerald Guards, but many other Irish were antisecessionist in sentiment and eventually joined the union cause.¹¹ Where ever their allegiances may have taken them, Memphis fell to union forces in June 1862 and became a garrisoned city for the remainder of the war. While northern forces were determined to keep cotton profits out of the hands of pro-Confederates and thus the Confederacy, northern

financiers with connections to the British textile industry were desperate for the trade to continue. New England cotton mill owners also pressed the federal government for assistance in delivering cotton to their enterprises. The Confederacy's very survival, meanwhile, depended on the continuation of the cotton trade. While the federal Navy grew increasingly successful at inhibiting the activities of blockade runners, some cotton got through. Even better than trying to run the blockade, however, was making the cotton appear legitimate. Memphis cotton purchasers had to have "special permits from both the Treasury Department and the Provost Marshal, and all the purchasers [had to be] made within the city." This meant the Confederate cotton had to pass through union picket lines, but some union sentries were themselves complicit in the illegal trade in Confederate cotton. According to one government report, "Every colonel, captain, and quartermaster is in secret partnership with some operator in cotton; while every soldier dreams of adding a bale of cotton to his pay."¹² The Union Army attempted to control the cotton trade in Memphis but given the eagerness of both soldiers and civilians to participate in the trade, the army had little success. Working as they did on the wharf, the Irish were well positioned to profit from the enterprise. With cotton prices increasing from 11 cents per pound in 1860 to a dollar a pound in 1864, the temptations were too great. To put it in

perspective, a 450 pound bale of cotton would have been worth \$450 dollars, a sum that would have more than quadrupled the annual salary of the most successful dock worker in Memphis. So much illicit cotton came through city that the United States War Department closed all trade into Memphis in 1864.¹³

Once the war was over, the cotton trade reopened but American cotton producers were now operating in a world with new competitors, particularly in India, a British colony. Although prices remained high - compared to prewar levels -- they had fallen from a \$1.02 per pound in 1864 to .43 cents per pound in 1866. They would continue to decline in the decades to come. Meanwhile, as soldiers returned from the war, the employment situation worsened. This exacerbated tensions in South Memphis near Fort Pickering where a contingent of black soldiers were in residence. In May 1866 a riot broke out in that district in which at least half the white rioters were Irish. The new commandant at Fort Pickering restricted black soldiers to barracks while gangs of whites attacked black civilians, raped five black women and killed 46 blacks. Ninety-one homes and several black institutions - 4 schools and 8 churches - were burned to the ground. The event played a role in moving Congress toward Radical Reconstruction. To the discomfort of the Memphis elite, it also put the city under a national microscope.

Both the official army report and the local white elite characterized the white rioters as working class Irish responding to competition with blacks for the lowest level jobs. Although the riot took place some miles from Pinch, the Irish working class as a whole in the city took the brunt of the criticism. The army report indicated, however, that the local newspapers and city leaders had engaged in a campaign of racist rhetoric in the months before the riot and thus contributed to the heightening of racial tensions. Historian Altina Waller corroborates this assertion but in a close examination of the evidence, found that the overwhelming number of Irish involved in the riot were not of the working class but a struggling entrepreneurial class feeling threatened by possible limitations on their upward mobility presented by the growing presence of African Americans. Although Waller's analysis was focused on south Memphis, the same kinds of tensions almost certainly prevailed in Pinch. There the Irish population was declining, from 2,670 (52.7%), a high point for them, in 1860, to 1,757 (36%), in 1870. The black population was moving in the other direction. From a total of 372 or 7.3 percent in 1860 (mostly enslaved), African Americans accounted for 1,328 or 27.2 percent of the population in 1870. That demographic shift would continue and intensify over the next few decades.¹⁴

NATIONWIDE		MEMPHIS MARKET AREA	Percent of market share
Year	Bales	Bales	
1859	4,508,000	466,279	(10.3%)
1860	3,841,000		
1861	4,491,000		
1862	1,597,000		
1863	449,000		
1864	229,000		
1865	2,094,000		
1866	2,097,000		
1867	2,520,000		
1868	2,366,000		
1869	3,011,000	281,184	(9.3%)
1870	4,352,000		

All of this was taking place in the context of a cotton economy in crisis. In the immediate post war years, southern cotton producers struggled in vain to return to pre-war production levels. We do not have figures for discrete regions such as the Memphis market area except during census years, but we know from other sources that heavy spring rains, a very dry early summer and then heavy rains again in August and September resulted in a short crop for growers there in 1866, the year of the riot. Not only would planters suffer the consequences of a short crop, both the cotton elite and the dock workers in Memphis, would find their economic situations seriously circumscribed. Information for the census year 1870, which reported harvests for 1869, suggests that Memphis area producers were on par with those of other cotton areas in the South, but,

possibly owing to their inability to secure sufficient labor, they had yet to return to prewar levels. In 1869 southern cotton production was down by nearly a million and a half bales compared to 1860, while Memphis area cotton producers were marketing 185,095 bales fewer bales than they had in 1860 and 91,000,000 million pounds of cotton less. This would change the next year, but for many farmers and planters in the area and for many dock workers in Memphis, the change likely came too late.¹⁵

The planters, the cotton elite, and the laborers of Memphis endured this decline in production within an economic and political landscape marked by the controversy between ex-Confederates eager to reclaim political ascendancy and white and black Republicans determined to prevent that from taking place. Like elsewhere in the South, the redeemers would eventually get the upper hand. In 1872, the state's Republican governor lost his position to a redeemer Democrat, largely because he had appealed to former Confederates by re-enfranchising them, a strategy that worked no better in Tennessee than it did elsewhere.¹⁶ But the redeemer Democrats in Memphis faced serious opposition from a coalition made up Irish, German, and Italian immigrants and, significantly, African American citizens. The latter, together with the Irish, constituted the largest number of voters in the coalition, and together they managed to elect an Irish mayor in 1874 and several alderman from African

American and immigrant (Irish) wards. The Irish had been organized in groups either directly or indirectly associated with St. Peter's Catholic Church in Pinch since the Nativist threat in the 1850s. Meanwhile, Blacks had developed their own cadre of leaders around the Beale Street Baptist Church in one of the southern wards. According to historian Armstead Robinson, that church served as the "mother" Baptist church in Memphis, and one of its "children" opened in Pinch to serve the growing black population there. The white cotton elite in Memphis hardly looked upon this successful coalition with enthusiasm, and acting in concert with other whites, particularly newly re-enfranchised former Confederates, organized a People's Protective Union.¹⁷

The leadership of the old elite was vulnerable to challenge in part because of their failure to solve the debt problem dating back to the 1850s that portended disaster. The panic of 1873 had made the city's financial situation worse and exposed them to even greater criticism, a factor in the Irish/African American coalition's success in 1874. Memphis had one of the highest debt ratios of any city in the country and, unable to work out a satisfactory compromise with its creditors, was on the verge of municipal bankruptcy. Much of this debt was the result of commitments made by the city to infrastructure improvements that either never materialized or were so

inadequate they failed within a few years. None of these improvements had been designed to serve the Irish and black communities, and the racist and anti-Irish rhetoric of the white leadership hardly inspired their loyalty. Although frayed and challenged by a white community intent upon recovering power, the coalition remained in place until the yellow fever epidemic in 1878 gave the white elite an opportunity they seized.¹⁸

Rumors of a yellow fever outbreak had been drifting up river from New Orleans since the early summer of 1878, but city officials there, concerned about the implications for commercial trade, denied the presence of the disease until July 26th when obfuscation was simply no longer possible. On August 9th word reached Memphis that the epidemic had broken out in Granada, Mississippi, a city a hundred miles south and linked with Memphis by railroad. That same day, Kate Bionda, an Italian immigrant who operated a Trattoria (a kind of restaurant) at 212 Front Street, became ill. Four days later she became the first confirmed fatality in Memphis. Although her establishment was in Ward 2, it was only a few short blocks from Pinch in Ward 1. Seven deaths were reported the next day, including four-year-old Martha Riley, the daughter of Irish immigrants. On August 16th, the Board of Health announced an evacuation from the low lying sections of the First, Second, and Eighth wards. They encouraged people to move away from the river, east along the

railroad tracks and outside the city limits where refugee camps had been established. Most of the middle class and elite people began to flee the city by any conveyance available: railroad, steamship, coaches, and by horseback. By the end of August approximately 25,000 of the 50,000 people in the city had managed to escape. By that time other cities in the region were refusing to accept refugees from Memphis. Most of those who remained did so because they had no means to depart. Some few thousand moved into the refugee camps and an undetermined number of others simply camped on uninhabited areas on the outskirts of Memphis. Of the approximately 20,000 remaining within the city, about 6,000 were white and 14,000 were African Americans. Virtually all of them suffered an experience with the disease and over 5,000 died. Of the 14,000 blacks, 956 died (6% (blacks had a resistance, though not an immunity to the disease). Of the 6,000 whites who remained, 4,204 (70%) died.¹⁹

Only a few of the middle class and members of the elite remained in the city during the epidemic. Most of the white policemen departed or died and order was maintained by members of the black police force. In the power vacuum that existed during the crisis, the cotton elite made its move to recapture power. The city's finances, in disarray before the epidemic, were in ruins after it. Unable to negotiate effectively with its creditors, the city's mayor and the surviving aldermen

allowed the Protective League to step into the breach, repudiate the debt, and surrender the city's charter to the state.

Memphis became the "Taxing District of Shelby County" until 1893 with a director and two of four commissioners appointed by the governor. The cotton elite dismantled the ward system and substituted the new commission form of government, one that called for city-wide elections, a system that allowed the cotton elite to dominate both the appointments and elections for most of the existence of the taxing district. The Irish and African-American coalition lay in shreds. Their political ascendancy had depended on the first, ninth, and tenth wards but "from 1879 through 1893, not a single commissioner lived" in those wards. Yet the cotton elite did not move to disfranchise African Americans, and, instead, capitalized on the black vote to maintain their control. Their competitors consisted of other business interests and a white middle and working class eager to limit black political participation.²⁰

The elite's new political ascendancy, accomplished after overturning the ward system in favor of commission government, had freed them to fight amongst themselves over a number of issues, particularly how to fund improvements to the city's streets, school financing, and debt settlement. One issue they had little disagreement over, however, involved an environmental problem that threatened them all. Settlers along the upper

Mississippi River and its' tributaries had cleared and drained millions of acres of land; in doing so they redirected an enormous amount of water and debris into the fast-flowing river. By the time it reached the Memphis area, the river was a virtual monster, unpredictable in both flow and ferocity.²¹

In 1876 Congress authorized the creation of the Memphis District of the Corps of Engineers, a response to the growing threat of floods to Memphis and the surrounding area, and in 1879 Congress established the Mississippi River Commission (MRC). Although the later was headquartered in St. Louis, it maintained an office in Memphis and held frequent meetings there to address the specific needs of the city's residents and those of farmers and planters in the region. Memphis businessmen and cotton brokers welcomed the greater commitment on the part of the federal government and hoped that soon federal funds would aid them in repairing the damage to the city's harbor. Memphis was better connected by railroad lines by this time, but the river remained the most important component of its commercial success, receiving and dispatching tens of millions of pounds of cotton annually, among many other business-related necessities.²²

Their determination to protect the port has to be understood in the context of the recovery of the cotton economy in the region. By 1879, the area's planters were producing over 75 million more pounds of cotton than they had produced in 1859

and 166 million more pounds of cotton than they had produced in 1869. These figures would continue to climb over the next two decades. The flood of 1882, however, did serious damage to the city's harbor, and another flood in 1883 caused further destruction. Using their influence with the Memphis District of the Corps of Engineers, the cotton elite pressed Congress for aid and Congress responded by appropriating \$200,000 in July 1884, to remedy the situation.²³

The cotton elite and the city's other business leaders were united in their support of improvements to the city harbor, but this was an uneasy alliance in other respects. The cotton elite maintained its control of municipal government in part by appealing to the black vote. Though the African American community suffered a reduction of political influence during this period, they continued to deliver voters and their respective communities received some benefits. As disfranchisement efforts swept across the South, Democrats in favor of disfranchisement swept into the state legislature in 1888 in Tennessee and enacted disfranchisement measures aimed mostly at the cities of Memphis, Nashville, Chattanooga, and Knoxville. In Memphis, those who resented the cotton elite's control welcomed the opportunity to undermine them by eliminating one major source of their power - the black vote - and successfully unseated the cotton elite in municipal

elections in 1890. By the time Memphis surrendered the taxing district arrangement and reclaimed its city charter in 1893, the cotton elite no longer remained in control over city government, but they continued to be an important economic force and thus maintained considerable political influence.²⁴

By this time, the area's cotton producers were marketing 366,079,500 pounds of cotton. African American workers, however, now held the lion's share of occupations along the Memphis waterfront. Far fewer Irish immigrants were coming into the city, and many of the descendants of the original immigrants had enjoyed some occupational mobility. In Ward 1 in 1860 the Irish constituted 52.7 percent of the population and 70.8 percent of them worked as unskilled and menial laborers. By 1900, they constituted only 9.4 percent of the ward and only 26.4% held jobs in the lowest occupational ranks. The rest had moved into semi-skilled, blue collar, and skilled position or they were proprietors of small establishments. Some were working as clerks and salesmen and a small percentage (10.2%) had moved into the top two occupational categories. On the other hand, by 1900, 89.6 percent of African Americans were in the lowest two levels of occupation. While a thriving black middle class was developing along Beale Street in south Memphis, the African Americans of Pinch relied on a very small group of professionals and black owned or operated businesses: one

attorney, two physicians, and one merchant. No fewer than five preachers, however, lived and worked in Pinch, and provided the crucial community organization there.

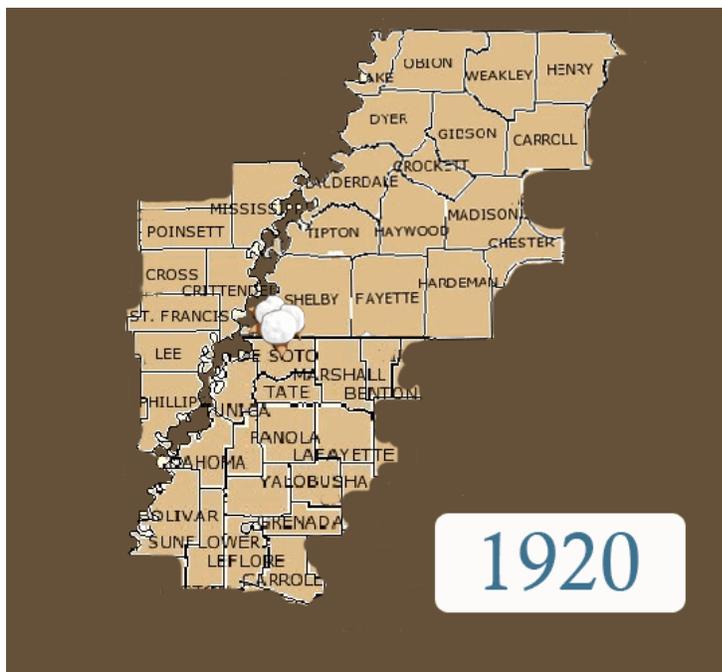
Jennifer Keith speculates that the Irish may have ceased "coming to Memphis because the economy was weak or because transportation patterns changed or because they were afraid of yellow fever." As she points out, "in 1870 the foreign-born comprised 17 percent of the Memphis population; in 1890, just over 8 percent, and in 1900, it was 5 percent."²⁵ Whatever the reason, the African American population filled the gap. As the tenancy and sharecropping system increasingly circumscribed the lives of blacks on the area's plantations, more and more of them sought opportunities in Memphis. Given the imposition of disfranchisement segregation statutes in Tennessee, few of them would realize their hopes and expectations for something more than laboring positions along the wharf. Instead, most of them, particularly in Pinch, provided the labor necessary to load the hundreds of millions of pounds of cotton on ships to feed the expansion in the world cotton market.

ENDNOTES

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See Tables I-IV. For the purposes of this study, I have used cotton production figures for counties nearest Memphis in the northern Mississippi, eastern Arkansas, and western Tennessee area. This is a smaller circle of counties than the Memphis Cotton Exchange claims so constitutes a conservative estimate. The Arkansas counties are Crittenden, Cross, Lee, Mississippi, Phillips, Poinsett, and St. Francis; the Mississippi counties are Benton, Bolivar, Carroll, Coahoma, DeSoto, Grenada, Lafayette, Leflore, Marshall, Panola, Quitman, Sunflower, Tallahatchie, Tate, Tunica, and Yalobush; the Tennessee counties are Carroll, Chester, Crockett, Dyer, Fayette, Gibson, Hardeman, Haywood, Henry, Lauderdale, Madison, Obion, Shelby, Tipton, Weakley. While the Tennessee River flows through northern Mississippi, by the time that the Chickasaw lands were purchased by the United States in 1834, Memphis was already established and though the Tennessee River was important, no town of significance develops capable of challenging Memphis' hold over the cotton trade in the region. Janie V. Paine, *The Memphis Cotton Exchange: One Hundred Years* (Memphis, The Memphis Cotton Exchange, 1973), p. 4.





- ² Kathleen C. Berkeley, "Ethnicity and Its Implications for Southern Urban History: The Saga of Memphis, Tennessee, 1850-1880," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, Vol. L, (Winter 1991): 193-202; Joe Brady, "The Irish Community in Antebellum Memphis," *The West Tennessee Historical Society Papers*, Vol. XL (December 1986): 25-44; Polly Owens, "Is It True What They Say About the Irish?" *The West Tennessee Historical Society Papers*, Vol. XXXII (Oct. 1978): 120-132; Kate Born, "Organized Labor in Memphis, Tennessee, 1826-1901," *The West Tennessee Historical Society Papers*, Vol. XXI (1967): 48-59; David M. Tucker, "Black Politics in Memphis, 1865-1875," *The West Tennessee Historical Society Papers*, Vol. XXVI (1972): 5-14.
- ³ By cotton elite I mean those individuals whose livelihoods were bound up with the cotton economy: cotton factors, commission merchants, cotton compress owners, and those who owned and operated various port facilities that catered to the cotton trade
- ⁴ A particularly insightful and carefully researched essay by Altina L. Waller challenges the long held assumption that lower class Irish were the prime motivators of the race riot. She finds that it was an entrepreneurial class of upwardly mobile Irish who organized and led the riot and that they directed their attention to African Americans newly arrived in the city. It served the purposes of the white elite in Memphis to perpetuate this point of view as it relieved them of the burden of responsibility. In fact, the white elite were complicit, as the Freedmen's Bureau Report on the riot suggests. See Altina L. Waller, "Community, Class and Race in the Memphis Riot of 1866," *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 18 (Winter 1984): 233-246; "The Freedmen's Bureau Report on the Memphis Race riots of 1866," T.W. Gilbreth, Memphis, Tennessee to Maj. Genl. O.O. Howard & Commissioner B.R.F. & A.L., Washington, D.C., May 22, 1866 (report accessed at <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/the-freedmens-bureau-report-on-the-memphis-riot>.) Older interpretations accept the standard view of working class Irish vying with African Americans for the lowest level jobs available in the ward. See Bobby L. Lovett, "Memphis Riots: White Reaction to Blacks in Memphis, May 1865-July 1866," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* Vol. XXXVIII (Spring 1979): 9-33; Jack D.L. Holmes, "The Underlying Causes of the Memphis Race Riot of 1866," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* Vo. XVII (March-December, 1958): 195-221. As to the post-riot alliance and the impact of the yellow fever epidemic, see Lynette Boney Wrenn's excellent study which includes an impressive analysis of the political evolution that occurs in the late nineteenth century, particularly

regarding the city's experience with the surrender of the city's charter, the creation of the taxing district, and the imposition of the commission form of government which worked to marginalize the Irish voter. See Wrenn, *Crisis and Commission Government in Memphis: Elite Rule in a Gilded Age City* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998). Jeannette Keith's book focuses more narrowly on the yellow fever epidemic of 1878 but also includes useful information on the political evolution of the taxing district. See Keith, *Fever Season: The Story of a Terrifying Epidemic and the People Who Saved a City* (New York and London: Bloomsbury Press, 2012). An especially impressive MA Thesis, using GIS mapping technology, reexamined the common understanding of precisely where the epidemic began in Memphis and provided useful maps showing the heaviest concentration of cases in the city. See Sheridan Wright Kennedy, "The 1878 Yellow Fever Epidemic in Memphis, Tennessee: An historical Geographic Information Systems (HGIS) Approach," MA Thesis, Department of Geography, California State University, Long Beach, 2011.

⁵ The drop in population between 1870 and 1880 for the city as a whole was 16.5%; for Ward one, it was 23%. The rise in population from 1880 to 1900 for the city was 205 percent; for the old ward, it was 97%, a reflection of the city's expansion into outlying areas.

⁶ Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003). The literature on the sharecropping and tenancy system is extensive but must begin with Pete Daniel's *Shadow of Slavery*, a crucial book that established the field. Also contributing crucial insights are the following: Harold D. Woodman, *New South, New Law: The Legal Foundations of Credit and Labor Relations in the Postbellum Agricultural South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995); Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation* (Cambridge [Eng.] and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Leon Litwack, *Been in a Storm so Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Knopf, 1979); and Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-enslavement of Black People in America from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Doubleday, 2008). See also Jeannie Whayne, *Delta Empire: Lee Wilson and the Transformation of the New South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011).

⁷ Memphis' future as the great steamboat capital on that section of the Mississippi River was not assured until the purchase of those Chickasaw lands. In the 1830s, it was competing with a slightly larger town just to the north called Randolph. History and Facts about Memphis and Shelby County, Memphis Public Library, accessed, March 18, 2012; Marshall Wingfield, "Town of Randolph: Turbulence Marked Its Brief Career," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, November 27, 1949, Memphis Information Files, Randolph, Memphis/Shelby County Public Library and Information Center, Memphis, Tennessee. See also Don Wilson, "Randolph, The Glory Years," *The West Tennessee Historical Society Papers*, Vol. LI (December 1997), pp. 98-105 and Gerald M. Capers, Jr. *The Biography of a River Town, Memphis: Its Heroic Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939): pp. 57-59.

⁸ These statistics are drawn from Ward 1, Manuscript Census of Population, Ward 1, Memphis, 1860. The following table, rendered in SPSS, selected for Irish only:

Occupa Recoded

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
High White Collar, professionals	7	.3	.5	.5

Major proprietors, managers, and officials	7	.3	.5	.9
Low White Collar, Clerks, and Salesmen	18	.7	1.2	2.1
Semi Professionals	2	.1	.1	2.2
Petty Proprietors, Managers, and Officials	60	2.2	3.9	6.1
Blue collar, Skilled	204	7.6	13.1	19.2
Semiskilled and Service Workers	152	5.7	9.8	29.0
Unskilled labor and menial service workers	1100	41.2	70.8	99.8
Farmers and Planters	3	.1	.2	100.0
Total	1553	58.2	100.0	
Missing System	1117	41.8		
Total	2670	100.0		

[Note: Those listed as “missing system” would include unemployed men, women, and children]
The next table examines the Irish vs. the Native white population. The table does not include African Americans. There were 372 African Americans, including 20 free blacks, but no occupations were listed for the slaves. Five of the black men characterized themselves as drayman and six black women were washer women.

Occupa Recoded * Irish or Not Crosstabulation

		Irish or Not		Total
		Irish	Not Irish	
High White Collar, professionals	Count	7	38	45
	% within Irish or Not	0.5%	4.6%	1.9%
Major proprietors, managers, and officials	Count	7	38	45
	% within Irish or Not	0.5%	4.6%	1.9%
Low White Collar, Clerks, and Salesmen	Count	18	67	85
	% within Irish or Not	1.2%	8.2%	3.6%
Semi Professionals	Count	2	4	6
	% within Irish or Not	0.1%	0.5%	0.3%
Petty Proprietors, Managers,	Count	60	37	97

	and Officials	% within Irish or Not	3.9%	4.5%	4.1%
		Count	204	330	534
	Blue collar, Skilled	% within Irish or Not	13.1%	40.3%	22.5%
		Count	152	140	292
	Semiskilled and Service Workers	% within Irish or Not	9.8%	17.1%	12.3%
		Count	1100	164	1264
	Unskilled labor and menial service workers	% within Irish or Not	70.8%	20.0%	53.3%
		Count	3	1	4
	Farmers and Planters	% within Irish or Not	0.2%	0.1%	0.2%
		Count	1553	819	2372
Total		% within Irish or Not	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

⁹ For the Influx of Irish and Germans (Jews) in the 1850s and the Nativist and Know Nothing response, see Berkeley, "Ethnicity and Its Implications for Southern Urban History," p. 196; and Joe Brady's "The Irish Community in Antebellum Memphis," pp. 43-44. Berkeley's focus is more on the German Jews, however, and as Joe Brady suggests, her analysis of the Irish community is thin. Brady takes issue with Berkeley's assertion that the Irish did little community building, for example, and cites activities associated with S.t Peter's Church and also finds evidence of Irish organizations reminiscent of those the Irish had in Ireland. His analysis of some of these organizations, given the excellent work done by Tayler Anbinder on the Irish in New York City, suggests that a future study of the Irish may reveal similarities across region. Brady also establishes that the reputation of the Pinch district pre-dated the Irish arrival. See Brady, "The Irish Community," 24, 29-30. See also Tyler Anbinder, *Five Points: the 19th-Century New York City Neighborhood that Invented Tap Dance, Stole Elections, and Became the World's Most Notorious Slum* (New York: Plume by the Penguin Group, 2001).

¹⁰ Capers, *Biography of a River Town*, p. 192.

¹¹ Berkeley, "Ethnicity and Its Implications," p. 196; Brady, "The Irish Community," p. 44.

¹² Joseph H. Parks, "A Confederate Trade Center Under Federal Occupation: Memphis, 1862-1865," *Journal of Southern History* 7 (August 1941), p. 301. See also Capers, *The Biography of a River Town*, pp. 153-54.

¹³ The historiography on the cotton trade during the Civil War has taken on new energy in recent years, especially see Sven Beckert, "Emancipation and Empire: Reconstructing the Worldwide Web of Cotton Production in the Age of the American Civil War," *American Historical Review* 109, no. 5 (December 2004): 1405-1538. See also Gene Dattel, *Cotton and Race in the Making of America: The Human Costs of Economic Power* (Chicago: Ian R. Dee, 2009) and Graeme J. Milne, *Trade and Traders in Mid-Victorian Liverpool: Mercantile Business and the Making of a World Port* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000). For Memphis during this period and, particularly, the cotton trade, see Joseph H. Parks, "A Confederate Trade Center Under Federal Occupation: Memphis, 1862-1865," *Journal of Southern History* 7 (August 1941), p. 301. See also Capers, *The Biography of a River Town*, pp. 153-54; Gerald M. Capers, Jr. *The Biography of a River Town, Memphis: Its Heroic Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939); and Robert A. Sigafos, *Cotton Row to Beale Street: A Business History of Memphis* (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1979), pp. 44-45.

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- ¹⁴ For cotton prices, see *Historical Statistics of the United States*, Table Cc205-266, Wholesale Prices of Selected Commodities, 1784-1998, p. 3-208-209. For the international situation concerning cotton trading during the war, see Beckert, "Emancipation and Empire"; Dattel, *Cotton and Race in the Making of America*, and Milne, Trade and Traders. For the race riot, see Waller, "Community, Class, and Race," pp. 234-235. For a very interesting and insightful study in another vein, see Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), pp. 61-83. See also Armstead L. Robinson, "Plans Dat comed from God: Institution building and the Emergence of Black Leadership in Reconstruction Memphis," *Toward a New South? Studies in Post-Civil War Southern Communities*, Orville Vernon Burton and Robert C. McMath, Jr., eds, pp. 71-102.
- ¹⁵ The Table: The figures for cotton production in the left hand column derive from statistical abstracts and are not provided for discrete areas – like the Memphis market, but the census of agriculture for 1859 and 1869 (in the right hand column) demonstrate that Memphis had nearly held on to its percentage of the American market share by the end of the ten-year period. Sigafos, *Cotton Row to Beale Street*, pp. 44-45. Bureau of the Census, Ninth Census, Vol. III, *The Wealth and Industry of the U.S., 1870* (Washington: Government Printing Office), pp. 100, 102, 184, 186, 244, 246, 245, 247; Bureau of the Census, Ninth Census, *Statistics of the Population of the United States, Vol. I* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), pp. 13-14, 41-43, 61-63. For detail on the short crop of 1866, see *The American Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1866*, Vol. VI (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1870), p. 7.
- ¹⁶ Tennessee's reconstruction history is similar to that which unfolded elsewhere in the South. The legislature passed a poll tax law in 1869 aimed at African Americans but was it ruled unconstitutional three years later. "Nearing the end of his second term as governor, Brownlow stepped down from office in February 1869 to accept a U.S. Senate seat and was replaced for the duration of his term by Senate Speaker Dewitt C. Senter, a conservative East Tennessee Unionist. Determined to win election in his own right and facing opposition from within his own party, Senter reached out for support from the state's Democrats by effectively setting aside the franchise law and allowing thousands of Confederate sympathizers to vote. Senter won the election, but conservative Democrats reclaimed control of the general assembly and "redeemed" the state from Republican rule. Although divisions within the Democratic Party would occasionally allow Republicans to challenge for state offices, after the election of 1869 Republican influence was largely limited to East Tennessee. Although without significant political power, Tennessee blacks statewide would continue to vote Republican in large numbers until the early 1890s, when they were effectively disfranchised by a combination of registration laws and poll taxes."
- ¹⁷ For Irish organizing, see Brady, "The Irish Community," pp. 32-37; for Black organizations, see Robinson, "Plans dat comed from God," pp. 74-75. For the People's Protective Union, see Wrenn, *Crisis and Commission Government in Memphis*, pp. 25-26.
- ¹⁸ For the role of the Irish Ward bosses who swept into office in January 1874, see Berkeley, "Ethnicity and Its Implications," p. 198. While Berkeley sees the end of the coalition brought about by the yellow fever epidemic Wrenn puts it in the context of the debt crisis and the panic of 1873. Wrenn, *Crisis and Commission Government in Memphis*, p. 33-34. See also Keith, *Fever Season*, p. 41.
- ¹⁹ Keith, *Fever Season*, pp. 7, 12, 55; Kennedy, "The 1878 Yellow Fever Epidemic in Memphis," pp. 10-13. See also Whayne, *Delta Empire*, pp. 40-42. The literature on yellow fever is extensive but a representative sample would include the following: Margaret Humphreys, *Yellow Fever and the South* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Humphreys, *Malaria: Poverty, Race, and Public Health in the United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); John H. Ellis, *Yellow Fever and Public Health in the New South* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), pp. 27-28; John R. Pierce and Jim Writer, *Yellow Jack: How Yellow Fever Ravaged America and Walter Reed Discovered its Deadly Secrets* (New

York: J. Wiley, 2005); Molly Caldwell Crosby, *The American Plague: The Untold Story of Yellow Fever, the Epidemic That Shaped Our History* (New York: Penguin, 2007). While all of these studies pay some attention to the resistance of Blacks to the yellow fever virus, see especially Todd L. Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery: The Diseases and Health Care of Blacks in Antebellum Virginia* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), pp. 18–19, 25.

²⁰ Wrenn, *Crisis and Commission Government in Memphis*, pp. 33-33, 94, 146-147; Keith, *Fever Season*, pp. 78-79. Note: on the repudiation of the debt, after eastern financial institutions raised a hue and cry, leaders in the Memphis Cotton Exchange worked with the state to establish a reasonable alternative, one which would honor the debt and allow the city to recover even as it paid a small portion on the debt for a period of years.

²¹ Ann Vileisis, *Discovering the Unknown Landscape: A History of America's Wetlands* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1997), pp. 71-73. Andrew A. Humphres, Joseph B. Eads, and Charles Ellet, Jr., were the three most prominent and influential engineers operating in the nineteenth century, see John M. Barry, *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How it Changed America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997). . The river inundated farmland just as new settlers were flocking into the region and demanding attention from a federal government unaccustomed and largely unwilling to address unprecedented demands that farm lands be protected from floods by the national government. Competing ideas about how to control the river and keep its channel open to commerce complicated the government's response. Some advocated a line of levees that channeled the river's flow in a predictable way. Others supported the use of levees together with creation of a series of controlled watersheds meant to allow the river to expand into certain reservoirs whenever necessary. The "levees only" approach won the debate

²² Whayne, *Delta Empire*, p. 64. See also Floyd M. Clay, *A Century on the Mississippi: A History of the Memphis District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1876-1981* (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Memphis District, 1986), pp. 14-17.

²³ The problem with the Memphis harbor, however, was complex and required a multifaceted approach. The most obvious issue was that the flooding had overwhelmed and inundated the harbor, damaging its structures and facilities. While buildings and docking facilities could be rebuilt, two more fundamental problems existed, one involving the city's custom of draining its increasing flow of waste water onto the river's bluff. This caused landslides of the easily fractured Chickasaw Bluff. It was solved by enclosing the city drains in wooden culverts and diverting the waste water from the bluff down to the river's edge. The third problem was more complicated and was caused by a peculiar set of environmental issues. The river had been damaging the bluff, eating away at it relentlessly, and by 1874 engineers estimated that a hundred feet per year along the water front was being destroyed. Meanwhile, an eddy current developed along the Memphis harbor, making it difficult for steamships and small craft alike to put into port there. It also caused flooding onto Market Street, which fronted the river, and threatened to destroy it. An eddy current typically develops on the downstream side of an obstruction protruding into a river, but this one resulted from the recession of Hopefield Point, on the Arkansas side of the river, a particularly unusual occurrence. Hopefield Point essentially protruded into the river which slammed into the point and tore off "great chunks" of it and deposited a "heavy loads of silt before the city." That would lead eventually to the formation of a bar in front of the Memphis harbor, which became Mud Island twenty years later, but in the 1880s an eddy current developed as the recession of Hopefield Point also caused a "counter current running from the length of Market Street to the mouth of the Wolf River." As the point's recession rate increased, the eddy current grew more severe. Eddy currents are especially treacherous in fast-moving rivers carrying debris such as the Mississippi, and the one that confronted Memphis

manifested as a giant whirlpool or a swirling maelstrom of water embedded with trees and branches that acted as projectiles dangerous to steamships putting into port. *Ibid.*, pp. 24, 33-36

²⁴ Wrenn, *Crisis and Commission Government in Memphis*, pp. 143-144.

²⁵ Keith, *Fever Season*, p. 198.

Table I
Improved Acres in Farms, 1850 to 1820
Selected Counties

	1850	1860	1870	1880	1900
Arkansas	65,501	175,426	123,783	286,179	722,311
Mississippi	726,319	1,080,448	949,670	1,193,344	1,757,181
Tennessee	1,031,449	1,178,936	1,389,478	1,794,471	2,427,259
Total	1,823,269	2,434,810	2,462,931	3,273,994	4,906,751

[Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of Agriculture of the United States, 1860*, Vol. III (Government Printing Office: Washington, 1864), pp. 8-9, 84-85, and 132-133; *Ninth Census of Agriculture of the United States, 1870*, Wealth and Industry of the U.S. (GPO, 1872), pp. pp. 100, 184, 244, 246; *Tenth Census of Agriculture*, June 1, 1880, Part I (GPO, 1883), pp. 105, 122-1234, 133; *Twelfth Census of Agriculture, 1900*, Vol. 5, Pt. 2, Southern States (GPO, 1902), pp. 167, 168, 284, 285, 297, 298.]

Table II
Population, 1850-1920
Selected Counties

	1850	1860	1870	1880	1900
ARKANSAS					
Slaves/Blacks	5,243	13,835	18,007	40,675	73,492
Free/Whites	13,495	13,482	13,295	26,236	38,614
Total	18,738	27,317	31,302	66,911	112,106
MISSISSIPPI					
Slaves/Blacks	63,307	95,346	105,260	174,588	237,207
Free/Whites	59,102	58,336	75,690	88,066	99,719
Total	122,409	153,682	180,950	262,654	336,926
TENNESSEE					
Slaves/Blacks	77,485	93,830	120,682	169,474	225,804
Free/Whites	132,976	155,305	189,740	217,137	299,794
Total	210,461	249,135	310,422	386,611	525,598
TOTAL AREA					
Slaves/Blacks	146,035	203,011	243,949	384,737	536,503
Free/Whites	205,573	227,123	278,725	331,439	438,127
Total	351,608	430,134	522,674	716,176	974,630

[Special Note: The column for "Slaves/Blacks" only includes slaves in 1850 and 1860; it includes all blacks from 1870 to 1920; the column for Free/Whites, includes whites and free blacks in 1850 and 1860; and whites only from 1870 to 1920. Source: Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census, Population of the United States in 1860* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), pp. 18, 19, 270-271, and 466-167; *Ninth Census, Population of the United States in 1870*, Vol. 1, (GPO, 1872), pp. 13, 14, 41-43, 61-63; *Tenth Census of the United States, Population June 1, 1880*, Part I., (GPO, 1883), pp. 336-337, 358-359, 370-371; *Twelfth Census of the U.S. Population*, Part 1 (GPO, 1901), pp. 530, 545, 556-557.]

Table III
Pounds of Cotton, 1850 to 1910

	1850	1860	1870	1880	1900
Arkansas	3,263,600	17,382,000	17,399,000	44,467,000	62,722,000
Mississippi	51,321,600	138,195,000	65,144,000	141,924,000	210,215,500
Tennessee	45,044,800	77,562,500	58,049,000	123,269,000	93,142,000
Total	99,630,000	231,139,500	140,592,000	306,660,000	366,079,500

Table IV
Bales of Cotton, 1850 to 1920
Selected Counties

	1850	1860	1870	1880	1900
Arkansas	8,159	34,764	34,798	88,934	125,444
Mississippi	128,304	276,390	130,288	283,848	420,431
Tennessee	112,612	155,125	116,098	246,538	186,284
Total	249,075	466,279	281,184	619,320	732,159

Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of Agriculture of the United States*, 1860 (Government Printing Office: Washington, 1864), pp. 8-9, 84-85, and 132-133; *Ninth Census of Agriculture*, 1870 (GPO, 1872), p. 102, 186, 245, 247; *Tenth Census of Agriculture*, 1880 (GPO, 1883), pp. 214, 231, 241; *Twelfth Census of Agriculture*, 1900, Crops and Irrigation, Part II (Washington: GPO, 1902), pp. 430, 432, 434.

Table V
 Memphis Population
 Black/White

	1860	1870	1880	1900
White	18,741(82.8%)	24,755 (61.5%)	18,677 (55.8%)	52,380 (51.2%)
Free Black	198 (.9%)	15,471 (38.5%)	14,800 (44.2%)	49,910 (48.8%)
Slave	3,684 (16.3%)			
Total	22,623 (100%)	40,226 (100%)	33,592 (100%)	102,320 (100%)

Table VI
 Ward One Population

	1860	1870	1880	1900
White	4,674 (92.6%)	3,490 (71.5%)	2,118 (56.3%)	2,483 (33.6%)
Free Black	20 (.4%)	1,393 (28.5%)	1,643 (43.7%)	4,918 (66.4%)
Slave	352 (7.0%)			
Total	5,046 (100%)	4,883 (100%)	3,761 (100%)	7,406 (100%)

Numbers in red doesn't jibe with the manuscript spss file I have: 3,555 for white pop and 1328 for black

Table VII
Ward One Population
White Population – Irish or Native White

	1850	1860	1870	1880	1900
Irish	538 (38.9%)	2,670 (57.1%)	1,757 (49.4%)	1,101 (52.0%)	694(27.8%)
Native White	860 (61.1%)	2,004 (42.9%)	1,798 (50.6%)	1,017 (48.0%)	1,801 (72.2%)
Total	1,398 (100%)	4,674 (100%)	3,555 (100%)	2,118 (100%)	2,495 (100%)

Table VIII
Ward One Population
Native White, Irish, Black

	1850	1860	1870	1880	1900
Irish	548 (32.9%)	2,670 (52.7%)	1,757 (36.0%)	1,101 (30.8%)	694 (9.4%)
Native White	860 (51.6%)	2,004 (40.0%)	1,798 (36.8%)	1,017 (28.5%)	1,801 (24.3%)
Free Black/Black	6 (.4%)	20 (.4%)	1,328 (27.2%)	1,451 (40.7%)	4,904 (66.3%)
Slave	252 (15.1%)	352 (6.9%)			
Total	1,666 (100%)	5,066 (100%)	4,883 (100%)	3,569 (100%)	7,399 (100%)

(Note: five Chinese not included in 1900 tally)