

Testimony as a Window in Time

The question that is being used to assess Harriet Hernandez's Testimony is: what does this source reveal about how reconstruction era politics are shaped by Black Americans' new found freedom? There are many nuances of both federal and local politics that can be gleaned from this testimony. Particularly in how the tensions between Black American's visions for their future and white southern American's visions of white supremacy shape those federal and local politics.

One thing that is significant about this source is that there is a way for black people to be able to testify against the KKK. This shows a difference in attitudes surrounding white violence from what they were prior to 1865. Congress sees the violence perpetuated by the population of elite whites as a problem on which they should improve instead of just a byproduct of slavery. This shows how because Black Americans now have citizenship, they are now listened to by the government. These notions from the federal government are moved along especially due to the radical government in Congress.

A reason stated for the KKK targeting her is due to her husband taking advantage of citizenship and voting for who he wanted, which in this case was the radical ticket. The radical ticket was popular among Black Americans due to how those politicians promised to allow for black people to gain even more rights and access to governmental aid, furthering the KKK's fervor to prevent black voters by any means necessary – mainly extreme violence. At the time, a lot of the local politicians in the South were also Black Americans. The violence is political while also racial. These two motivations intermingle and cause each other. They are further increased due to white southerners not being able to participate in politics through voting because of their involvement with the confederacy. The way that they choose to react to this is

with domestic terrorism. Hernandez's husband might've experienced violence no matter who he voted for. Either way, by exercising his right to vote, he was going against the ideal world of the KKK.

In this document, the questioner, who goes unnamed, is methodical and seems to care more about the events/physical harm than the emotional pain Hernandez is experiencing. From this, it can be concluded that they want to get a picture of the full extent of this problem, possibly to root it out. They repeatedly ask the extent at which this problem affects other Black Americans that Hernandez knows and for names of other people potentially involved, whether its her perpetrators or her neighbors that are also victims of the political violence.

Due to Harriet Hernandez's newfound freedom, she also has the freedom to choose where she works. Her choice of employer becomes political because of the reactions it causes and their entanglement with the political violence her family is experiencing. Once again, this shows how white americans in the South no longer have the same power over Black Americans and are using violence in order to attempt to regain that power.

One thing that is also interesting about this document is how marriage is changed now that Black Americans are free. Marriage is an institution that can grant people more privileges, specifically in terms of taxes and rights pertaining to medical care. It is not specified when Hernandez and her husband got married, which also means it does not specify whether this is a legal marriage. While enslaved Africans were able to get married, this was not a legal process. It could be interesting to do further research into how those marriages translated once emancipation was enacted and they were American citizens. The KKK definitely does seem willing to use the Hernandezes' ties to each other in order to get what they want. Both halves of the couple have done something that transgresses the white supremacist view of society. Through violence, the

KKK punishes them not just physically but also by putting a potential wedge in their marriage. Hernandez's husband has barely been staying at their home, presumably in an attempt to subdue the violence pointed towards their family. Hernandez says as much. While this is honorable, it is also taking the father figure out of the household and this reaction to the violence doesn't allow the couple to live in their freedom together.

This testimony shows how in the South, the everyday becomes political and violent. the men that assault her are people she interacts with everyday. From how she describes it, they live very close to each other. She recognizes them enough to testify against them with certainty. The proximity of where they all live is fascinating and offers another dimension of how existing local intricacies of social life in the South that have been made more tense by emancipation, which allowed for different types of mobility – any sort of mobility— for black people. Which provoked reactions of those who wanted to keep that previous order.

In conclusion, this source can help to illuminate the many patterns of tension that color politics and social spheres in the South. It also shows why the federal government might've been more open to dealing with violence brought about by the KKK at this moment in time.