

Examining the Racialisation of White Workers in Rural Louisiana as a Technology of Capitalist Management and Control

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Abstract : In the 1950s, a wave of violent labor unrest shook a small town in south-western Louisiana leading to the racialisation of workers—previously considered white—as ‘mixed-race’ or, in local terms, ‘Redbone.’ This paper examines why the group known as ‘Redbones’ were marked as non-white in relation to strike violence and their opposition to capitalist expansion. Utilising archival research, historiography and oral testimony, I examine how an instance of labor unrest was reinterpreted by local law enforcement, an interstate capitalist class and the national press as calling into question the racial integrity of a group of workers who had been formerly marked as white. This explosive and largely unstudied strike provides an opportunity to better understand how racialisation operates as a technology of control, even over individuals who appear phenotypically white. The strike at Elizabeth allows a glimpse at the tactics of representatives of white supremacy when white workers do not fully embrace the ‘wages of whiteness.’

Keywords : American federation of labor, labor history, Louisiana history, wages of whiteness

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