America's Reconstruction

People and Politics after the Civil War

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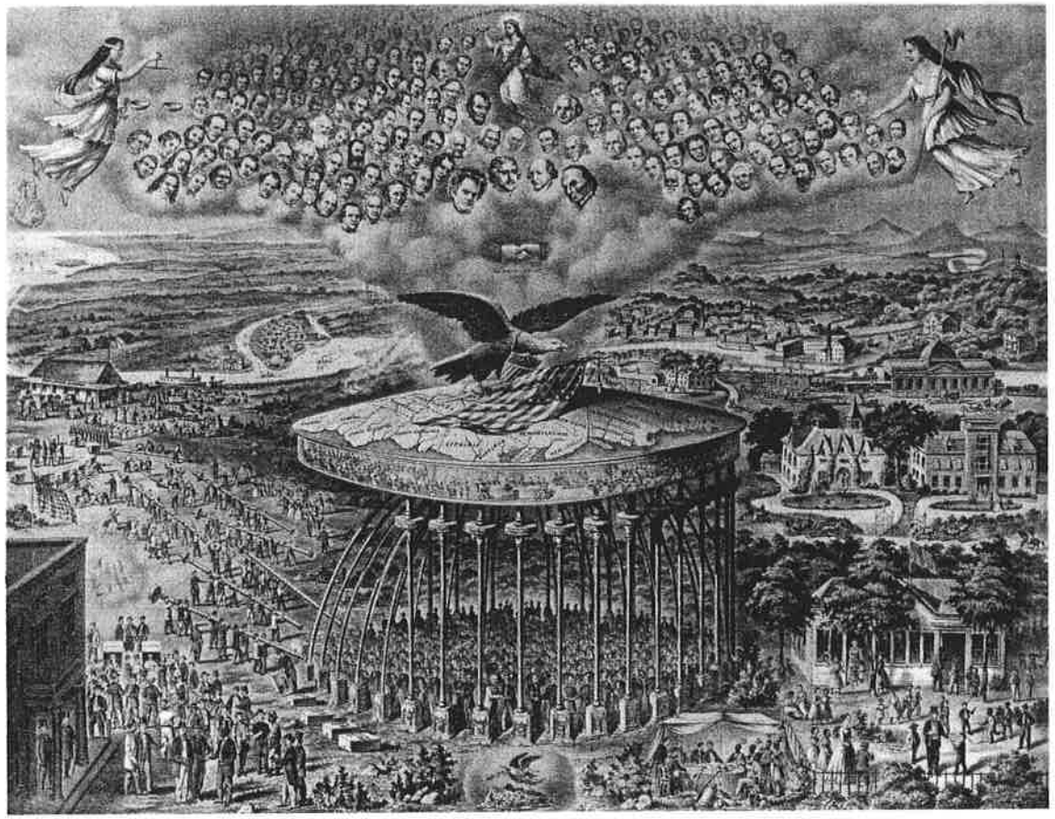

Reconstruction, ***lithograph published by Horatio Bateman of New York, 1867.*** (Library of Congress)

An elaborate allegory with religious overtones embodies the lofty ideals associated with the early years of Reconstruction. The United States, depicted as a colossal pavillion, is literally being reconstructed as the old columns of slavery are replaced with Justice, Liberty, and Education. The heavens are filled with portraits of American heroes from the North and South, including John C. Calhoun, Daniel Webster, and Abraham Lincoln. Below is a vignette with black and white infants sleeping beneath an American eagle holding a streamer that reads "All men are born free and equal."

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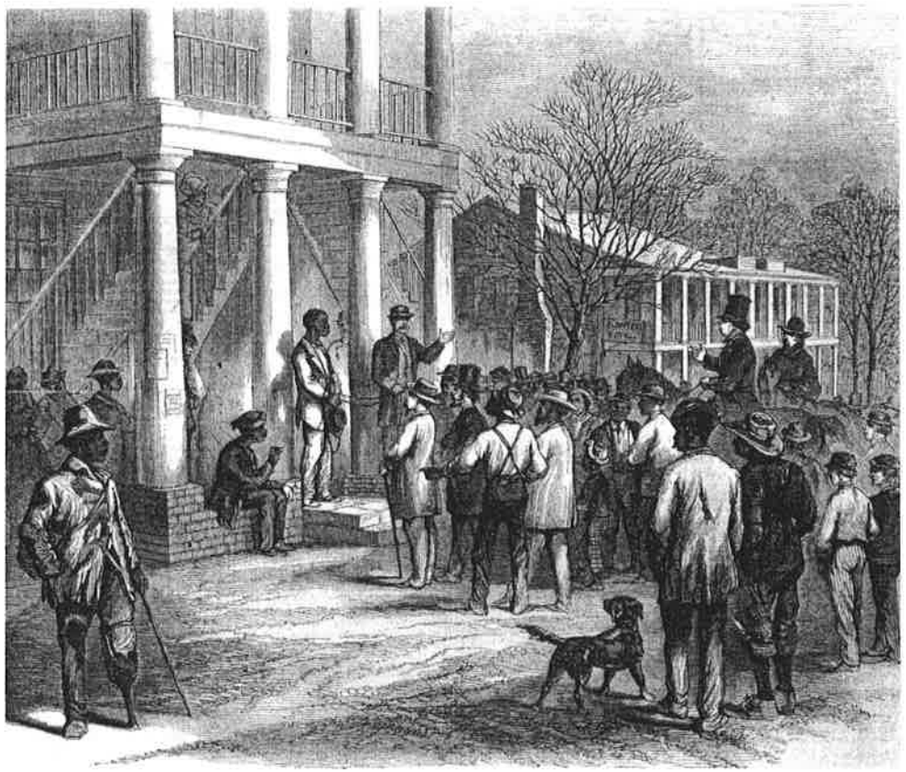
The Politics of Reconstruction and the Origins of Civil Rights

Robert E. Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia on April 9, 1865, effectively ending the Civil War. Five days later, President Lincoln was mortally wounded by an assassin. To his successor, Vice President Andrew Johnson, fell the task of overseeing the restoration of the Union. The only senator from a seceding state to remain at his post in 1861, Johnson had been appointed military governor of Tennessee by President Lincoln and was placed on the Republican ticket in 1864 as a symbol of Republican plans to extend their organization into the South. But Johnson proved incapable of providing the nation with enlightened leadership or meeting the North's demand for a just and lasting Reconstruction.

In personality and outlook, Johnson was ill suited for the responsibilities he now shouldered. A lonely, stubborn man, he was intolerant of criticism and unable to compromise. He lacked Lincoln's political skills and keen sense of Northern public opinion. Moreover, while Johnson had supported emancipation during the war, he held deeply racist views. A self-proclaimed spokesman for the poor white farmers of the South, he condemned the old planter aristocracy, but believed African-Americans had no role to play in Reconstruction.

With Congress out of session until December, Johnson in May 1865 outlined his plan for reuniting the nation. He issued a series of proclamations that inaugurated the period of Presidential Reconstruction (1865–67). Johnson offered a pardon to all Southern whites, except Confederate leaders and wealthy planters (and most of these subsequently received individual pardons), who took



Selling a Freeman to Pay His Fine at Monticello, Florida, ***engraving based on a drawing by James E. Taylor,*** **Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper,** ***January 19, 1867.***

The Black Codes, a series of laws passed by Southern states to define freedmen's rights and responsibilities, imposed serious restrictions upon former slaves. For example, Florida's code made disobedience a crime, and blacks who broke labor contracts could be whipped, pilloried, and sold for up to one year's labor. The Black Codes created an uproar among many Northerners, who considered them to be another form of slavery.

an oath of allegiance. He also appointed provisional governors and ordered state conventions held, elected by whites alone. Apart from the requirement that they abolish slavery, repudiate secession, and abrogate the Confederate debt—all inescapable consequences of Southern defeat—the new governments were granted a free hand in managing their affairs. Previously, Johnson had spoken of severely punishing "traitors," and most white Southerners believed his proposals surprisingly lenient.

Radical Republicans criticized Johnson's plan of Reconstruction for ignoring the rights of the former slaves. But at the outset, most Northerners believed the policy deserved a chance to succeed. The conduct of the new Southern governments elected under Johnson's program, however, turned most of the Republican North against the president.

Johnson assumed that when elections were held for governors, legislators, and congressmen, Unionist yeomen would replace the planters who had led the South into secession. In fact, white voters by and large returned members of the old elite to power. Alarmed by the apparent ascendancy of "rebels," Republicans were further outraged by reports of violence directed against former slaves and Northern visitors in the South. But what aroused the most opposition were laws passed by the new Southern governments, attempting to regulate the lives of the former slaves. Known as the Black Codes, these laws did grant the freedpeople certain rights, such as the right to own property and bring suit in court. African-Americans could not, however, testify against whites, serve on juries or in state militias, or vote.

Responding to planters' demands that the freedpeople be forced back to work on the plantations, the Black Codes required blacks to sign yearly labor contracts. The unemployed were declared vagrants, who could be arrested, fined, and hired out to white landowners. Some states limited the occupations open to blacks, and tried to prevent them from acquiring land. African-Americans strongly resisted the implementation of these measures, and the apparent inability of the South's white leaders to accept the reality of emancipation fatally undermined Northern support for Johnson's policies. The Black Codes, wrote one Republican, were attempts to "restore all of slavery but its name."

When Congress assembled in December 1865, Johnson announced that with loyal governments functioning in all the Southern states, Reconstruction was over. In response, Radical Republicans, who had grown increasingly estranged from Johnson during the summer and fall, called for the abrogation of these governments and the establishment of new ones with "rebels" excluded from power and black men granted the right to vote.

Andrew Johnson

Andrew Johnson, seventeenth president of the United States, c. 1865. (Library of Congress)

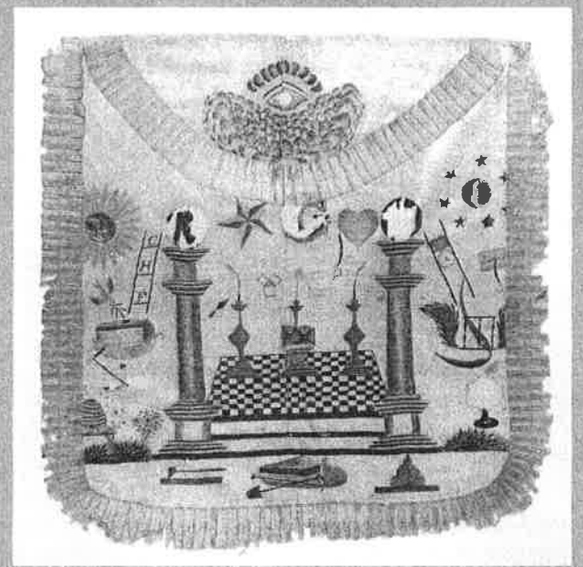
The only president ever impeached and tried before the Senate, Andrew Johnson (1808–75) came from the humblest origins of any man who reached the White House. Born in poverty in North Carolina, he worked as a youth as a tailor's apprentice.

After moving to Greenville, Tennessee, Johnson achieved success through politics. Beginning as an alderman, he rose to serve two terms as governor. Although the owner of five slaves before the Civil War, Johnson identified himself as the champion of his state's "honest yeomen" and a foe of large planters, whom he described as a "bloated, corrupted aristocracy." He strongly promoted public education and free land for Western settlers.

A fervent believer in states' rights, Johnson was also a strong defender of the Union. He was the only senator from a seceding state to remain at his post in 1861, and when Union forces occupied Tennessee, Abraham Lincoln named him military governor. In 1864, he was elected vice president.

Succeeding to the presidency after Lincoln's death, Johnson failed to provide the nation with enlightened leadership and also failed to deal effectively with Congress. Racism prevented him from responding to black demands for civil rights and personal inflexibility rendered him unable to compromise with Congress. Johnson's vetoes of Reconstruction legislation and opposition to the Fourteenth Amendment alienated most Republicans. In 1868, he came within one vote of being removed from office by impeachment.

After leaving office in 1875, Johnson returned to Tennessee. He died shortly after being reelected to the Senate.



Andrew Johnson's Masonic apron, painted silk, c. 1860.
(Tennessee State Museum Collection)

In 1851, Andrew Johnson, then a U.S. Congressman, joined Masonic Lodge No. 3 in Greenville, Tennessee. Perhaps his lifelong devotion to the order reflected his aspirations to rise above his humble origins and the pride he took in doing so. The symbols on Johnson's ceremonial apron indicate that he had attained a high rank in the fraternal order.

Charles Sumner, U.S. senator from Massachusetts, c. 1865. (Chicago Historical Society)

Charles Sumner, an early opponent of slavery, advocate of equality before the law, and a leader of the Radical Repubicans, viewed Reconstruction as an opportunity to establish civil rights for African-Americans. He strongly opposed Andrew Johnson's Reconstruction policies and voted to convict the president at his impeachment trial in 1868. Sumner wrote the bill that became the Civil Rights Act of 1875, the final piece of Reconstruction legislation, which outlawed racial discrimination in transportation and places of public accommodation.

Most Republicans, however, were moderates, not Radicals. They believed Johnson's plan flawed, but desired to work with the president in modifying it and did not believe either Northern or Southern whites would accept black suffrage. Radicals and moderates joined together in refusing to seat the Southerners recently elected to Congress. Then they established a Joint Committee to investigate the progress of Reconstruction.

Early in 1866, Lyman Trumbull, a senator from Illinois, proposed two bills, reflecting the moderates' belief that Johnson's policy required modification. The first extended the life of the Freedmen's Bureau, which had been established for only one year. The second, the Civil Rights Bill, was described by one congressman as "one of the most important bills ever presented to the House for its action." This defined all persons born in the United States as citizens and spelled out rights they were to enjoy without regard to race—making contracts, bringing lawsuits, and enjoying "full and equal benefit of all laws and proceedings for the security of person and property." These, said Trumbull, were the "fundamental rights belonging to every man as a free man." The bill left the new Southern governments in place, but required them to accord blacks the same civil rights as whites. It made no mention of the right to vote. In effect, the bill voided the Black Codes, as well as numerous Northern laws discriminating against blacks, and the Supreme Court's Dred Scott decision of 1857, which had decreed that no African-American could be a citizen of the United States.

Passed by overwhelming majorities in both Houses of Congress, the Civil Rights Bill represented the first attempt to define in legislative terms the essence of freedom and the rights of American citizenship. In empowering the federal government to guarantee the principle of equality before the law, regardless of race, against violations by the states, it embodied a profound change in federal-state relations.

To the surprise of Congress, Johnson vetoed both bills. Both, he said, threatened to centralize power in the federal government and deprive the states of their authority to regulate their own affairs. Moreover, he believed blacks did not deserve the rights of citizenship. Johnson offered no possibility of compromising with Congress; he insisted instead that his own Reconstruction program be left unchanged. The vetoes made a complete breach between Congress and the president inevitable. In April 1866, the Civil Rights Bill became the first major law in American history to be passed over a presidential veto.

Unwittingly, Johnson had given cause for the moderate and Radical Republicans to unite against him. Congress now proceeded to adopt its own plan of Reconstruction. Its first task was to fix in the Constitution, beyond the reach of presidential vetoes and shifting electoral majorities, the Republican understanding of the legacy of the Civil War. In June, Congress approved the Fourteenth Amendment, which broadened the federal government's power to protect the rights of all Americans. It forbade states from abridging the "privileges and immunities" of American citizens or depriving any citizen of the "equal protection of the laws." In a compromise between Radical and moderate positions on black suffrage, it did not give blacks the right to vote, but threatened to reduce the South's representation in Congress if black men continued to be denied the ballot. The amendment also barred repayment of the Confed-

erate debt and prohibited many Confederate leaders from holding state and national office. And it empowered Congress to take further steps to enforce the amendment's provisions.

The most important change in the Constitution since the adoption of the Bill of Rights, the Fourteenth Amendment established equality before the law as a fundamental right of American citizens. It shifted the balance of power within the nation by making the federal government, not the states, the ultimate protector of citizens' rights—a sharp departure from prewar traditions, which viewed centralized power, not local authority, as the basic threat to Americans' liberties. In authorizing future Congresses to define the meaning of equal rights, it made equality before the law a dynamic, elastic principle. In the twentieth century, many of the Supreme Court's most important decisions expanding the rights of American citizens have been based on the Fourteenth Amendment, perhaps most notably the 1954 ruling that outlawed school segregation.

Nonetheless, the amendment left some Republicans dissatisfied. Radicals like Pennsylvania Congressman Thaddeus Stevens and Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts were disappointed that it did not guarantee black suffrage. (The amendment, Stevens told the House, was a political compromise, but he supported it "because I live among men and not among angels.") The women's rights movement felt betrayed because in its representation section, the amendment for the first time introduced the word "male" into the Constitution. A state would lose representation if any men were denied the vote, but none if women continued to be disenfranchised.

The Fourteenth Amendment and the Congressional policy of guaranteeing civil rights for blacks became the central issues of the political campaign of 1866. Congress now demanded that in order the regain their seats in the House and Senate, the Southern states ratify the amendment. Johnson denounced the proposal and embarked on a speaking tour of the North, the "swing around the circle," to urge voters to elect congressmen committed to his own Reconstruction program. Denouncing his critics, the president made wild accusations that the Radicals were plotting to assassinate him. His behavior further undermined public support for his policies, as did riots that broke out in 1866 in Memphis and New Orleans, in which white policemen and citizens killed scores of blacks.

In the Northern congressional elections that fall, Republicans opposed to Johnson's policies won a sweeping victory. Nonetheless, egged on by Johnson, every Southern state but Tennessee refused to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment. Congress now moved to implement its own plan of Reconstruction. The intransigence of Johnson and the bulk of the white South pushed moderate

The Freedmen's Bureau, *campaign broadside, 1866.* (Library of Congress)

The national debate over Reconstruction, and in particular, the Freedmen's Bureau, is evident in a campaign broadside from Pennsylvania's gubernatorial campaign of 1866. The cartoon's racist imagery played upon public fears that government assistance would benefit indolent freedmen at the expense of white workers.

Republicans toward the proposals of the Radicals. In March 1867, over Johnson's veto, Congress adopted the Reconstruction Act, which divided the South into five military districts, temporarily barred many Confederates from voting or holding office, and called for the creation of new governments in the South, with black men given the right to vote. Only after the new governments ratified the Fourteenth Amendment could the Southern states finally be readmitted to the Union.

Thus began the period of Congressional or Radical Reconstruction, which lasted until the fall of the last Southern Republican government in 1877. It was

Burning a Freedman's Schoolhouse, ***engraving based on a sketch by Alfred R. Waud,*** **Harper's Weekly,** ***May 26, 1866.***

On May 1, 1866, two horsedrawn hacks, one driven by a black man, the other by a white man, accidentally collided on a street in Memphis. When police arrested the black driver, a group of black veterans recently discharged from the army intervened, and a white crowd began to gather. From this incident followed three days of racial violence in which white mobs destroyed hundreds of structures in the black community, including a freedman's school. At least forty-six blacks and two whites died in the disturbance. The Memphis riot helped to discredit Andrew Johnson's Reconstruction policies by indicating that many white Southerners did not accept the reality of emancipation.

the nation's first real experiment in interracial democracy. "We have cut loose from the whole dead past," wrote one Republican senator, "and have cast our anchor out a hundred years" into the future.

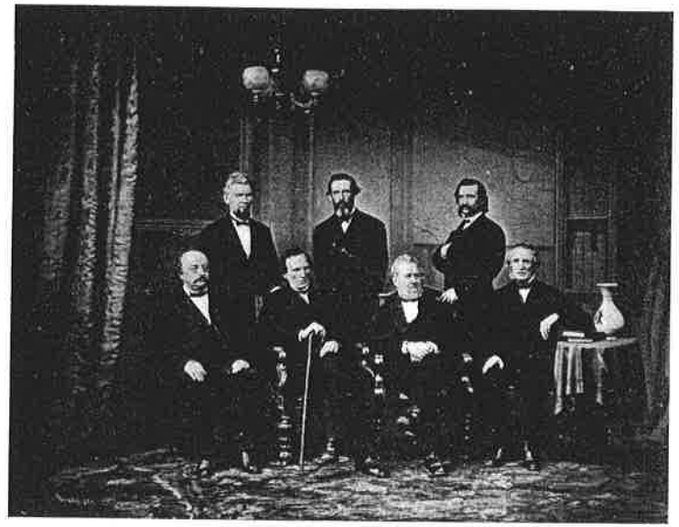
The conflict between President Johnson and Congress did not end with the passage of the Reconstruction Act. In order to shield its policy against presidential interference, Congress in March 1867 adopted the Tenure of Office Act, barring the president from removing certain officeholders, including Cabinet members, without the consent of the Senate. To Johnson, this was an unconstitutional restriction of his authority. In February 1868, he removed Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, an ally of the Radicals. The House of

President Andrew Johnson, lithograph by Currier & Ives, New York, 1868.
(Museum of American Political Life)

President Andrew Johnson's ability to work with Congress and his public popularity eroded as he followed a plan of Reconsturction that gave Southern whites a free hand in establishing new governments that threatened to reduce African-Americans to a condition similar to slavery. After Johnson vetoed several Reconstruction measures passed by Congress, his opponents charged him with autocratic behavior; one disgruntled citizen mocked the president by drawing a crown on his portrait.

Andrew Johnson's Reconstruction, *by Thomas Nast,* Harper's Weekly, *September 1, 1866.*

Nast's cartoon, casting President Johnson as Shakespeare's character Iago and a black Union soldier as Othello, reflects the North's anger over Andrew Johnson's Reconstruction policies. Johnson's vetoes of the Freedmen's Bureau and Civil Rights Bills, as well as his opposition to the Fourteenth Amendment, alienated most Republicans and eventually led to his impeachment in 1868.

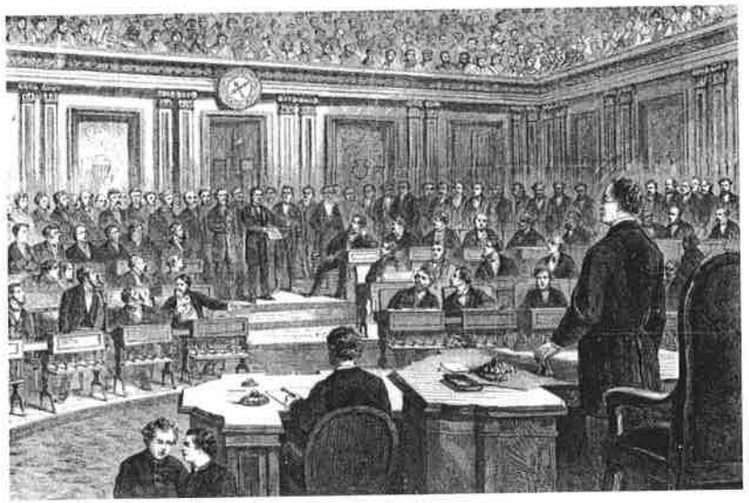


Impeachment managers, 1868. **(National Archives)**

In March 1868, for the first time in American history, the U.S. House of Representatives voted to impeach an American president for "high crimes and misdemeanors." The House Board of Managers for the impeachment of Andrew Johnson included, standing from left to right: James F. Wilson, Iowa; George S. Boutwell, Massachusetts; John Logan, Illinois; and, seated, from left: Benjamin F. Butler, Massachusetts; Thaddeus Stevens, Pennsylvania; Thomas E. Williams, Pennsylvania; and John A. Bingham, Ohio.

Representatives responded by approving articles of impeachment against the president.

Thus, for the only time in American history, a president was placed on trial before the Senate for "high crimes and misdemeanors." If convicted of the charges against him, which essentially involved his violation of the Tenure of Office Act, Johnson would be removed from office. Virtually all Republicans, by this point, considered Johnson a failure as president and an obstacle to a lasting Reconstruction, but some moderates disliked the prospect of elevating to the presidency Benjamin Wade, a Radical who, as president pro tem of the Senate, would succeed Johnson. Others feared conviction would damage the constitutional separation of powers between Congress and the executive. The final tally was 35 to 19 to convict Johnson, one vote short of the two-thirds necessary to remove him from office. Seven Republicans had joined the Democrats in voting to acquit the president.



Formal Notice of the Impeachment of Andrew Johnson, *engraving from* Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, *March 14, 1868.*

On February 25, 1868, the House Managers of Impeachment, led by Thaddeus Stevens and John A. Bingham, went before the U.S. Senate to present eleven articles of impeachment against President Andrew Johnson. The case rested on Johnson's removal of Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton from office, but in reality grew out of congressional disapproval of Johnson's Reconstruction policies. On May 26, 1868, the Senate voted 35 to 19 to convict Johnson, one vote short of the two-thirds necessary to remove him from office.

Johnson's acquittal weakened the Radicals' position within the party, and made the nomination of Ulysses S. Grant as the party's presidential candidate all but inevitable. As the nation's greatest war hero, Grant possessed obvious advantages as a candidate. After initially supporting Johnson's policies, Grant had come to side with Congress, but Radicals worried that he lacked strong ideological convictions. His Democratic opponent was Horatio Seymour, the colorless former governor of New York.

Reconstruction was the central issue of the 1868 campaign. The Republican platform declared black suffrage in the South essential for reasons of "public safety, of gratitude, and of justice," but failed to take a forthright position on whether Northern blacks should be allowed to vote. It did insist, however, that

Ulysses S. Grant, Mathew Brady Studio, Washington, D.C., c. 1868. **(Chicago Historical Society)**

In 1868, Civil War hero Ulysses S. Grant ran as the Republican party's nominee for president and narrowly defeated his Democratic opponent Horatio Seymour, former governor of New York. Grant supported Republican Reconstruction policies but aligned himself with the moderate wing of the party. Despite the corruption that marked his first administration, Grant easily won reelection in 1872.

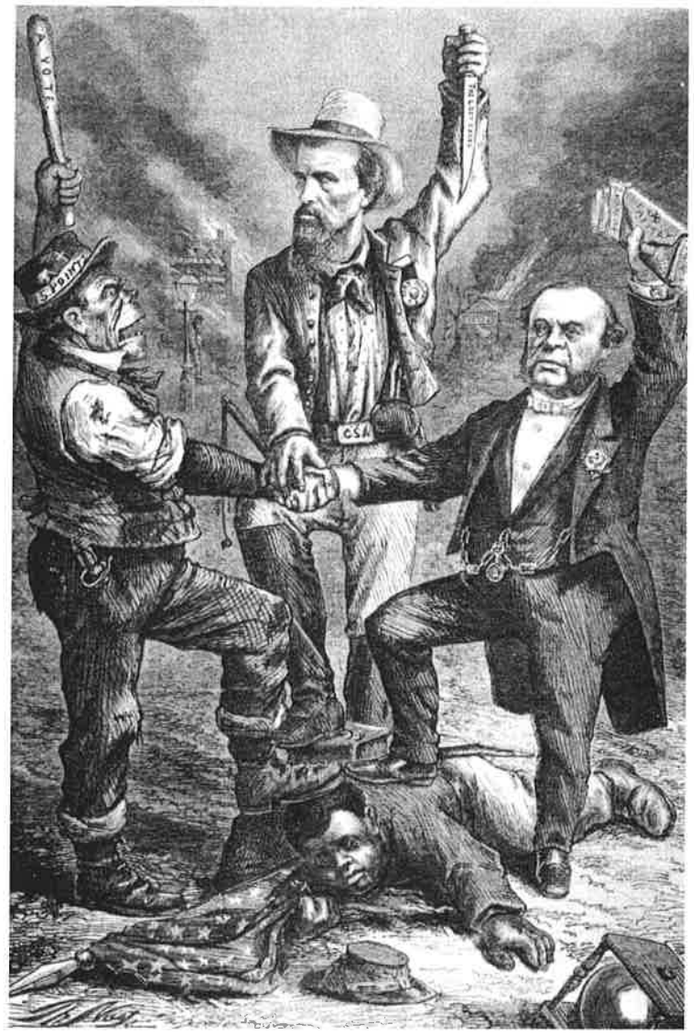
Congressional Reconstruction must go forward. Democrats denounced Reconstruction as unconstitutional and condemned black suffrage as a violation of America's political traditions. The campaign was bitter. Republicans identified their opponents with secession and treason, a tactic known as "waving the bloody shirt." Democrats appealed openly to racism, charging that Reconstruction would lead to interracial marriage and black supremacy throughout the nation.

Presidential campaign buttons, 1868. **(Museum of American Political Life)**

Ulysses S. Grant chose Schuyler Colfax, former Speaker of the House, as his running mate in the 1868 presidential campaign. "Let Us Have Peace," the last line of Grant's letter accepting the nomination, became the Republicans' campaign slogan. The Democrats' nominee, Horatio Seymour, ran on a platform opposing Reconstruction. "This Is a White Man's Government" became the slogan of a Democratic campaign that openly appealed to racial fears and prejudice.

Grant won the election, although by a margin many Republicans found uncomfortably close. He received overwhelming support from black voters in the South, but Seymour may well have carried a majority of the nation's white vote. Nonetheless, the result was a vindication of Republican Reconstruction and inspired Congress to adopt the era's third amendment to the constitution. In February 1869, Congress approved the Fifteenth Amendment, prohibiting the federal and state governments from depriving any citizen of the right to vote because of race. Bitterly opposed by the Democratic party, it became part of the Constitution in 1870.

Although it left the door open to suffrage restrictions not explicitly based on race—literacy tests, property qualifications, poll taxes—and did nothing to extend the right to vote to women, the Fifteenth Amendment marked the culmination of four decades of agitation on behalf of the slave. As late as 1868, even



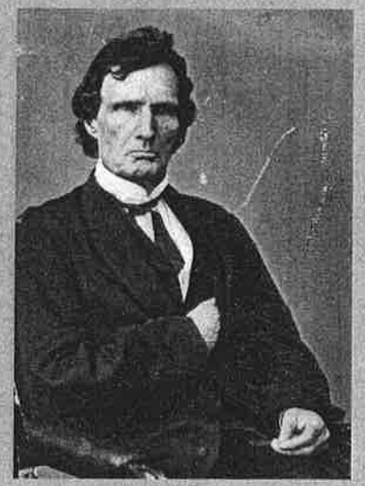
This Is A White Man's Government, *by Thomas Nast,*
Harper's Weekly, *September 5, 1868.*

During the 1868 presidential campaign, political cartoonist Thomas Nast ridiculed the Democratic party as a coalition of Irish immigrants (left), *white supremacists like Nathan Bedford Forrest, leader of the Ku Klux Klan* (center), *and Northern capitalists represented by Horatio Seymour, the presidential nominee* (right). *Nast's cartoon depicted Democrats as the oppressors of the black race, represented by a black Union soldier felled while carrying the American flag and a ballot box.*

after Congress had enfranchised black men in the South, only eight Northern states had allowed black men to vote. In March 1870, the American Anti-Slavery Society disbanded, its work, its members believed, now complete. "Nothing in all history," exclaimed veteran abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, equaled "this wonderful, quiet, sudden transformation of four millions of human beings from . . . the auction-block to the ballot-box."

Congressional Reconstruction policy was now essentially complete. Henceforth, the focus of Reconstruction lay within the South.

Thaddeus Stevens



Thaddeus Stevens, congressman from Pennsylvania and leader of the Radical Republicans, c. 1865. (Library of Congress)

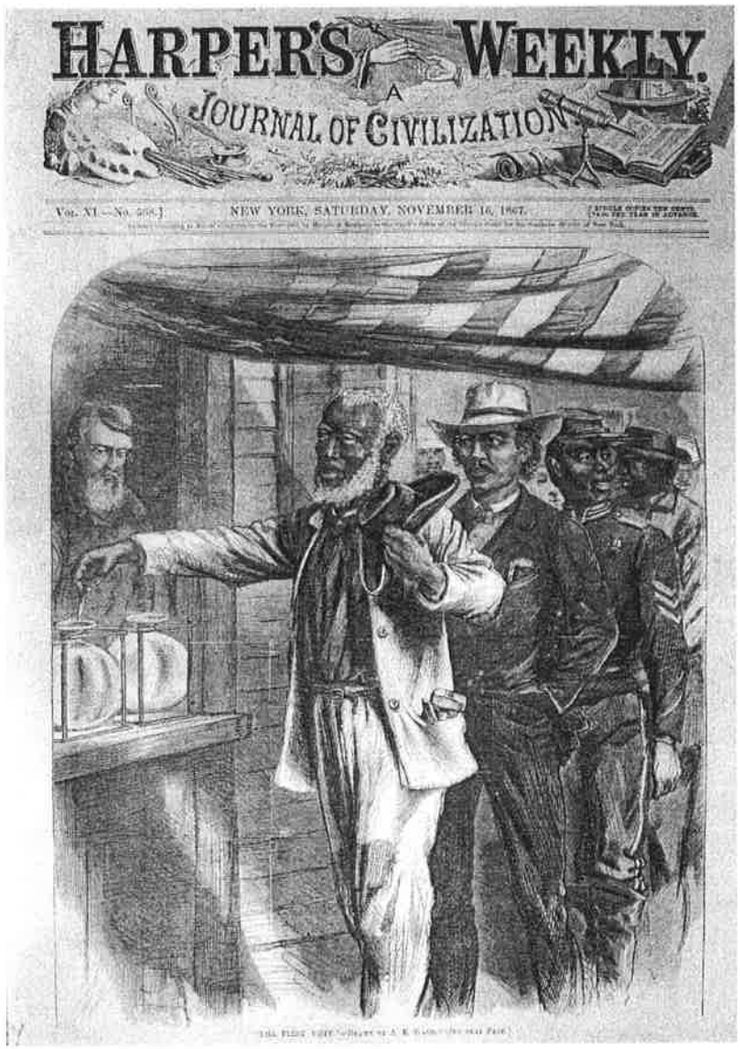
The most prominent Radical Republican in Congress during Reconstruction, Thaddeus Stevens (1792–1868) was born and educated in New England. He moved as a young man to Pennsylvania, where he practiced law, became an iron manufacturer, and entered politics.

Stevens served several terms in the legislature, where he won renown as an advocate of free public education. He also championed the rights of Pennsylvania's black population. A delegate to the constitutional convention of 1838, he refused to sign the document because it limited voting to whites.

As a congressman, Stevens during the Civil War urged the administration to free and arm the slaves and by 1865 favored black suffrage in the South. He became one of Andrew Johnson's fiercest critics and an early advocate of his impeachment.

To Stevens, Reconstruction offered an opportunity to create a "perfect republic" based on the principle of equal rights for all citizens. As floor leader of House Republicans, he helped to shepherd Reconstruction legislation through Congress, although he thought much of it too moderate. His plan for confiscating the land of Confederate planters and dividing it among Northern settlers and the former slaves failed to pass.

After his death, Stevens was buried in an integrated cemetery in Pennsylvania, to illustrate, as the epitaph he had composed stated, "the principle which I advocated through a long life, Equality of Man before his Creator."



The First Vote, ***engraving based on a sketch by Alfred R. Waud,***
Harper's Weekly, ***November 16, 1867.***

Under provisions of the Reconstruction Act passed by Congress in 1867, Southern states could no longer restrict the right to vote because of race. Thus, Southern black men could vote three years before the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, which enfranchised American black men throughout the nation. Waud's engraving depicts three members of the black community—an artisan, a member of the middle class, and a soldier—standing in line to cast their ballots.

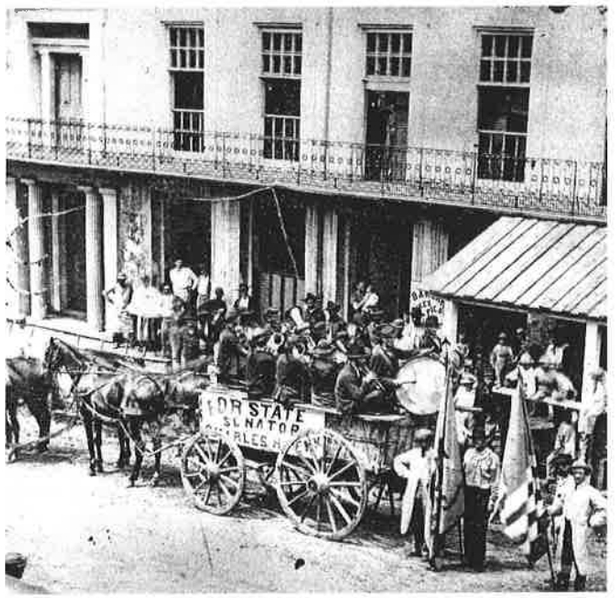
4

Reconstruction Government in the South

Among the former slaves, the passage of the Reconstruction Act of 1867, which brought black suffrage to the South, caused an outburst of political organization. Determined to exercise their new rights as citizens, thousands joined the Union League, an organization closely linked to the Republican party, and the vast majority of eligible African-Americans registered to vote. "You never saw a people more excited on the subject of politics than are the Negroes of the South," wrote a plantation manager.

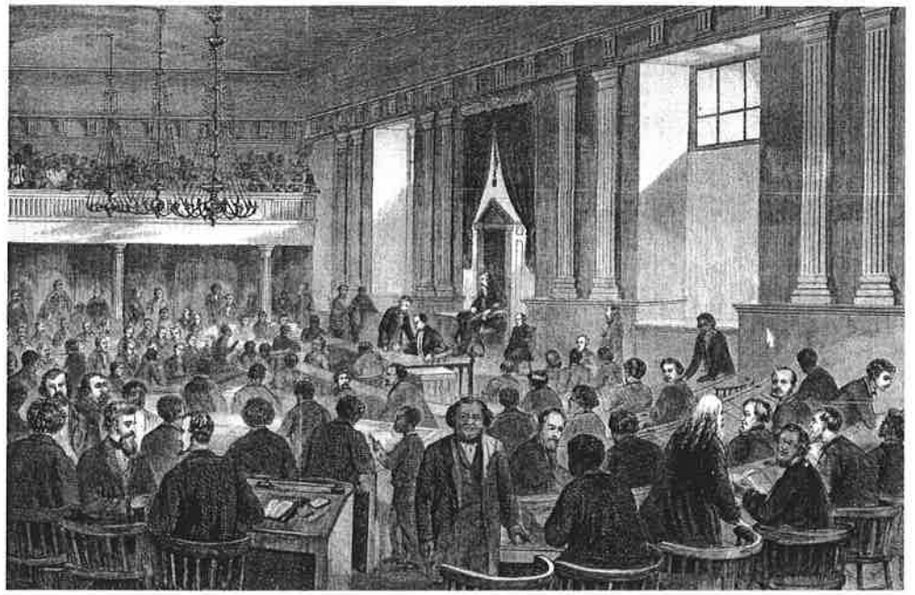
By 1870, all the former Confederate states had met the requirements of Congress and been readmitted to the Union, and nearly all were under the control of the Republican party. Their new constitutions, drafted in 1868 and 1869 by the first public bodies in American history with substantial black representation (of about 1,000 delegates throughout the South, over one-quarter were black), represented a considerable improvement over those they replaced. They made the structure of Southern government more democratic, modernized the tax system, and guaranteed the civil and political rights of black citizens. A few states initially barred former Confederates from voting, but this policy was quickly abandoned by the new state governments.

Throughout Reconstruction, black voters provided the bulk of the Republican party's support. Although Democrats charged that "Negro rule" had come to the South, nowhere did blacks control the workings of state government, and nowhere did they hold office in numbers equal to their proportion of the total population (which ranged from about 60 percent in South Carolina to around one-third in Arkansas, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas). Nonetheless, the fact that well over 1,500 African-Americans occupied positions of political power in the Reconstruction South represented a stunning departure in American government.



Election campaign in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, c.1868.
(Andrew D. Lytle Collection, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Louisiana State University)

American politics followed its noisy tradition in the South during Reconstruction with rallies, parades, and the ubiquitous brass band. The Union League, a Republican organization, conducted many campaigns and registered thousands of voters for local, state, and national elections.



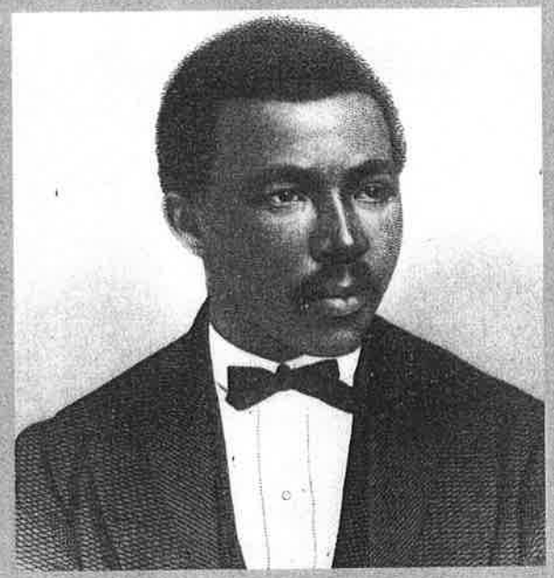
The State Convention at Richmond, Virginia in Session, *engraving*, Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, *February 15, 1868.*

The Reconstruction Act of 1867 stipulated that all former Confederate states except Tennessee hold conventions to draft new constitutions. In 1868–69, 265 black delegates, or one-quarter of the total, attended these conventions, making them the first public bodies in American history with substantial black representation. In Virginia, blacks made up one-fifth of the convention.

During Reconstruction, blacks were represented at every level of government. Fourteen sat in the House of Representatives, and two, Hiram Revels and Blanche K. Bruce, represented Mississippi in the Senate. P. B. S. Pinchback of Louisiana served briefly as America's first black governor (a century and a quarter would pass until C. Douglas Wilder of Virginia, elected in 1989, became the second). Other blacks held major state executive positions, including lieutenant governor, treasurer, and superintendent of education. Nearly 700 sat in state legislatures during Reconstruction, and there were scores of black local officials, ranging from justice of the peace to sheriff, tax assessor, and policeman. The presence of black officeholders and their white allies made a real difference in Southern life, ensuring that those accused of crimes would be tried before juries of their peers, and enforcing fairness in such prosaic aspects of local government as road repair, tax assessment, and poor relief.

Many of these officeholders had been born free, and around fifty had gained their liberty before the Civil War, by manumission, purchase, or escape. In South Carolina and Louisiana, homes of the South's wealthiest and best-educated free black communities, most prominent Reconstruction officeholders had never experienced slavery. A number of black Reconstruction officials had come from the North after the Civil War. The majority, however, were former slaves who had established their leadership in the black community by serving

Robert B. Elliott



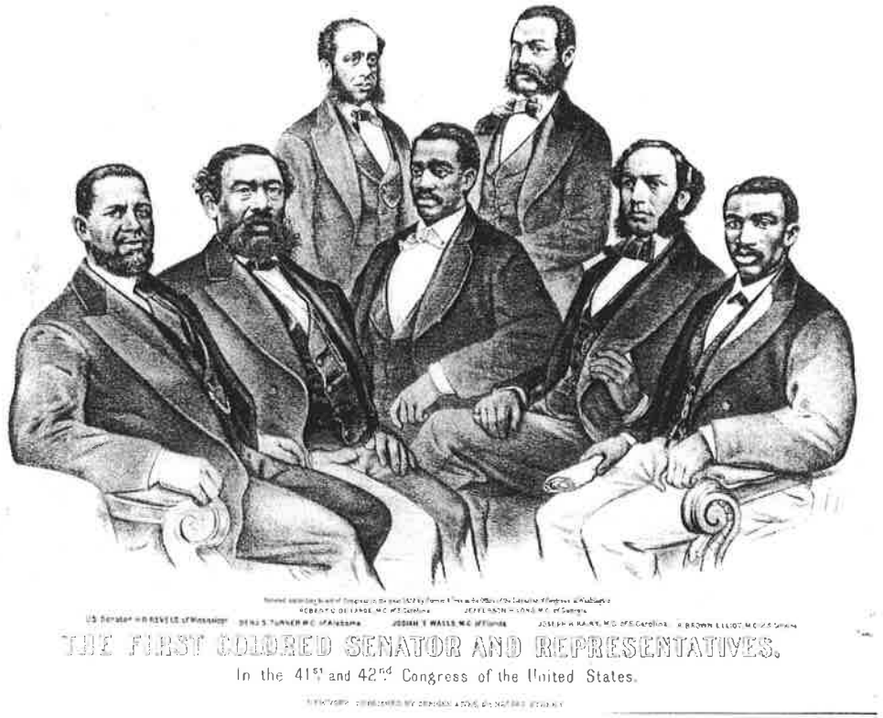
Robert B. Elliott, congressman from South Carolina. (Library of Congress)

One of the South's most brilliant political organizers during Reconstruction, Robert B. Elliott (1842–84) appears to have been born in Liverpool, England, of West Indian parents, and to have come to Boston on a British naval vessel shortly after the Civil War.

After moving to South Carolina in 1867, Elliott established a law practice and helped to organize the Republican party. He "knew the political condition of every nook and corner throughout the state," said one political ally. Elliott served in the constitutional convention of 1868 and the state legislature, and was twice elected to Congress. He resigned in 1874 to fight political corruption in South Carolina, where he became Speaker of the House.

In Congress, Elliott delivered a celebrated speech in favor of the bill that became the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which prohibited discrimination because of race in public accommodations. Elliott himself had been denied service in a restaurant while traveling to Washington.

In 1881, Elliott headed a delegation that met with president-elect James A. Garfield to complain that with the end of Reconstruction, Southern blacks were "citizens in name and not in fact." Because of his role in politics, Elliott's law practice was boycotted by white clients. He died penniless in New Orleans.



The First Colored Senator and Representatives, *lithograph, Currier & Ives, 1872.* (Library of Congress)

The Forty-first and Forty-second Congress included black members for the first time in American history. A commemorative print issued at the time portrays Senator Hiram Revels of Mississippi, and representatives Robert DeLarge of South Carolina, Jefferson Long of Georgia, Benjamin Turner of Alabama, Josiah Walls of Florida, and Joseph Rainey and Robert B. Elliott of South Carolina. A total of sixteen blacks sat in Congress during Reconstruction.

in the Union army, working as ministers, teachers, or skilled craftsmen, or engaging in Union League organizing. The son of Emanuel Fortune, a Florida lawmaker, explained how his father's Reconstruction prominence had its roots before the Civil War: "It was natural from him to take the leadership in any independent movement of the Negroes. . . . In such life as the slaves were allowed and in church work, he took the leader's part. When the matter of the Constitutional Convention was decided upon his people in Jackson County naturally looked to him to shape up matters for them."

Hiram Revels and Blanche K. Bruce

Portrait of Hiram Revels, by Theodor Kaufmann, oil on canvas, c. 1870. (Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University)

Blanche K. Bruce, senator from Mississippi. (Library of Congress)

The first African-Americans to serve in the United States Senate, Hiram R. Revels (1822–1901) and Blanche K. Bruce (1841–98) illustrate the diverse backgrounds and community activities of Reconstruction's black political leaders.

Revels was born free in North Carolina, attended Knox College in Illinois, and before the Civil War preached throughout the Midwest for the African Methodist Episcopal church. During the Civil War, he served as chaplain for a black regiment. Revels went to Mississippi in 1865 and became involved in the movement to establish schools for the former slaves.

After being elected to the state Senate in 1869, Revels was chosen by the legislature to fill Mississippi's unexpired term in the U.S. Senate, serving from February 1870 to March 1871. After leaving the Senate, Revels was for several years president of Alcorn University, an institution for African-American students established during Reconstruction. He also worked for the Methodist Episcopal Church, which he had joined during the Civil War, and in 1876 unsuccessfully protested his church's plans to hold racially segregated annual conferences in the South.

Blanche K. Bruce was born a slave. He may have been the son of his owner, a wealthy Virginia planter, and was educated by the same private tutor who instructed his master's legitimate child. Bruce was taken to Missouri in 1850, and in the early days of the Civil War escaped to Kansas, where he established the state's first school for African-American children.

Bruce went to Mississippi in 1868 with seventy-five cents to his name and launched a successful political career in Bolivar county, where he served as sheriff and tax collector, and edited a local newspaper. During his term in the Senate (1875–81), he worked to obtain federal aid for economic development in Mississippi. A staunch defender of black civil rights, Bruce also spoke eloquently in opposition to the 1878 law prohibiting Chinese immigrants from entering the United States.

Bruce remained in Washington after his term expired, holding a succession of government appointments. His wife, Josephine, who had been the first black teacher in the Cleveland public schools, went on to serve as Woman Principal of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama.

Louisiana Constitution and Members of Convention, *1868*. (Library of Congress)

Blacks, most of them freeborn, formed a majority of delegates at the Louisiana Constitutional Convention of 1868. They included Oscar J. Dunn, the state's lieutenant governor, and P. B. S. Pinchback, who became lieutenant governor and subsequently governor. Like all new Southern constitutions written after the war, Louisiana's guaranteed blacks civil and political rights.

Pinckney B. S. Pinchback

P. B. S. Pinchback, lieutenant governor and governor of Louisiana. (Library of Congress)

The only African-American to serve as governor of a state until the election of Virginia's C. Douglas Wilder in 1989, Pinckney B. S. Pinchback (1837–1921) exemplified the combination of motives, including desire for reform and an eye for personal gain, that inspired many Reconstruction leaders.

Born in Georgia, the son of a white planter and a free African-American woman, Pinchback attended school in Cincinnati and worked as a steward on Mississippi River steamboats. He made his way to New Orleans in 1862 and was appointed to recruit black soldiers for the Union army. He resigned from the army in 1863 after encountering discrimination from white officers.

As early as November 1863, Pinchback spoke at a rally in New Orleans demanding voting rights for blacks. He served in the constitutional convention of 1868, where he wrote the provision guaranteeing all citizens equal treatment in transportation and by businesses. Elected lieutenant governor in 1871, Pinchback became governor when Henry C. Warmoth was impeached in December 1872, serving for five weeks.

Pinchback accumulated considerable wealth while in office during Reconstruction, partly through a mercantile business he operated with another black lawmaker and partly through speculation in state bonds, the sale of real estate to the government at inflated prices, and other corrupt means. He remained a power in Louisiana politics into the 1890s.

Mifflin Gibbs and Jonathan Gibbs

Mifflin Gibbs, attorney and judge, Arkansas. (Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture)

Jonathan Gibbs, secretary of state and superintendant of education in Florida. (Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University)

The sons of an African-American minister in Philadelphia, Mifflin Gibbs (1823–1915) and Jonathan Gibbs (1827–74) had remarkable careers before becoming involved in Reconstruction politics.

A building contractor active in the antislavery movement, Mifflin Gibbs left Philadelphia for California in 1850 to take part in the gold rush. In 1855, he founded the state's first black newspaper, which campaigned for granting California's blacks the right to vote. Three years later, Gibbs moved to British Columbia, where he became involved in mining and railroad ventures and was twice elected to the Victoria city council.

Gibbs returned to the United States after the Civil War, studied at Oberlin College, and in 1871 moved to Arkansas, where he served as a judge in Little Rock. As an attorney, he won a case against a saloon that refused to serve black patrons. Gibbs remained active in Republican politics into the twentieth century, and from 1897 to 1901 was U.S. consul at Madagascar. In 1902, he published his autobiography, *Shadow and Light.*

Jonathan Gibbs was educated in Philadelphia and then, he later related, was "refused admittance into eighteen colleges because of my color." Eventually, he attended Dartmouth College, graduating in 1852. He then served as a Presbyterian minister in New York and Pennsylvania.

Sent to North Carolina as a religious missionary after the Civil War, Gibbs opened a school for the freedpeople, and then moved to Florida. He was appointed Secretary of State in 1868, and Superintendent of Education in 1873, becoming the only African-American to hold statewide office in Florida during Reconstruction. Hoping to counteract Democratic charges that blacks were by nature incapable of taking part in government, he wrote sketches of "distinguished colored men," past and present, for a local newspaper.

The new Southern Republican party also brought to power whites who had enjoyed little authority before the Civil War. Many Reconstruction officials were Northerners who for one reason or another had migrated South during and after the war. Their opponents dubbed them "carpetbaggers," implying that they had packed all their belongings in a suitcase and left their homes, in order to reap the spoils of office in the South. Some carpetbaggers were undoubtedly corrupt adventurers. The large majority, however, were former Union soldiers who decided to remain in the South when the war ended, before there was any prospect of going into politics. Others were investors in land and railroads who saw in the postwar South an opportunity to combine personal economic advancement with a role in helping mold the "backward" South in the image of the modern, industrializing North, substituting, as one wrote, "the civilization of freedom for that of slavery." Still another large group of carpetbaggers were teachers, Freedmen's Bureau officers, and others who came to the region genuinely hoping to assist the former slaves.

The largest group of white Republicans had been born in the South. Former Confederates reserved their greatest scorn for these "scalawags," whom they considered traitors to their race and region. Some were men of stature and wealth, such as James L. Alcorn, a former Whig leader and Mississippi's first Republican governor. Others were business entrepreneurs who believed a "new era" had dawned in the South, and that the Republican party was more likely to promote economic development than the Democratic. The largest number of scalawags, however, were nonslaveholding white farmers from the Southern upcountry. Some had been wartime Unionists who cooperated with the Republicans in order to prevent Rebels from returning to power. Unionists, declared a North Carolina Republican newspaper, must choose "between salvation at the hand of the Negro or destruction at the hand of the rebel." Other scalawags hoped Reconstruction governments would help them recover from wartime economic losses by suspending the collection of debts and enacting laws protecting small property holders from losing their homes to creditors. Nowhere in the South during Reconstruction did the Republican party receive a majority of the white vote, but in states like North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas, it initially commanded a significant minority.

Given the fact that many of the Reconstruction governors and legislators lacked previous experience in government, their record of accomplishment is remarkable. In many ways, Reconstruction at the state level greatly expanded the scope of public responsibility in the South. The new governments established the region's first state-supported public school systems, as well as numerous hospitals and asylums for orphans and the insane. These institutions were open to black

Robert Smalls

Robert Smalls, Civil War hero and congressman from South Carolina. (Library of Congress)

Among the most celebrated black heroes of the Civil War, Robert Smalls (1839–1915) had a political career that stretched into the twentieth century.

Born a slave in Beaufort, South Carolina, Smalls worked on the Charleston docks before the Civil War. Employed by the Confederacy as a pilot on the *Planter,* Smalls secretly guided the ship out of Charleston harbor in May 1862 and delivered it to federal forces. He was given a reward of $1,500 and made a second lieutenant in the Union navy. In 1864, Smalls was evicted from a segregated Philadelphia streetcar; a mass protest followed that led to the integration of the city's public transportation.

During Reconstruction, Smalls became a powerful political leader on the South Carolina Sea Islands. He represented Beaufort in the constitutional convention of 1868, published a local newspaper, and was elected to five terms in Congress. In 1895, he was one of six black delegates to the state constitutional convention, where he protested against the decision to deprive blacks of the right to vote. Until 1913, he held office as collector of customs at Beaufort.

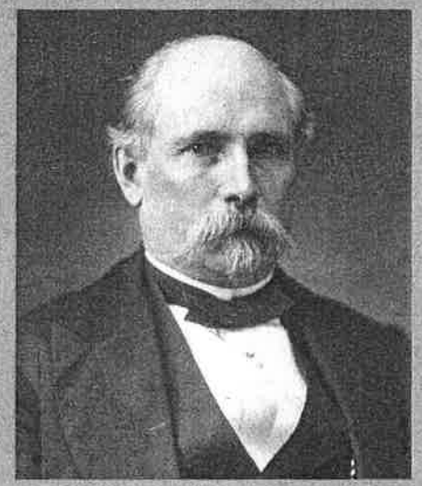
Reconstruction of the South, *lithograph by John Smith, Philadelphia, c. 1870.*
(National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution)

An optimistic view of Reconstruction with Biblical overtones presents key elements of the Republican plan to remake the South. The central figure is George Peabody, whose philanthropy supported Southern schools but opposed racial integration. On either side are Union Army officers transforming military weapons into tools for agriculture. In the background "300,000" mechanics, backed by northern capital, carry tools for the "Reconstruction of the Union."

and white Southerners, although generally, they were segregated by race. Only in New Orleans were the public schools integrated during Reconstruction, and only in South Carolina did the state university admit black students (elsewhere separate colleges were established for blacks). By the 1870s, in a region whose prewar leaders had made it illegal for blacks to learn and had done little to promote education among poorer whites, over half the children were attending public schools.

In assuming public responsibility for education, Reconstruction governments in a sense were following a path blazed by the North. Their efforts to guarantee African-Americans equal treatment in transportation and places of public accommodation, however, launched these governments into an area all but unknown in American law. Racial segregation, or the complete exclusion of

James L. Alcorn



James L. Alcorn, governor of Mississippi.
(Library of Congress)

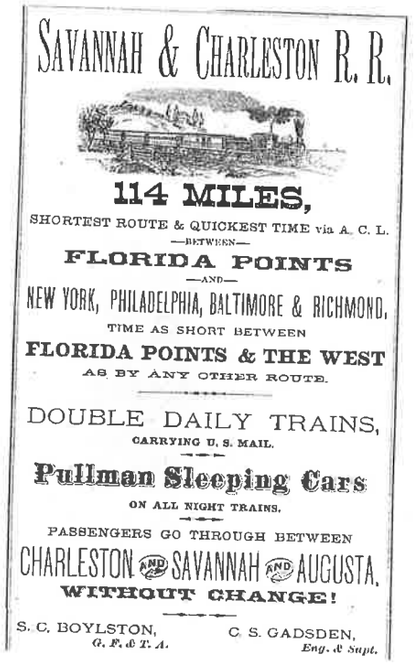
Born in Illinois but raised in Kentucky, James L. Alcorn (1816–94) became Mississippi's first Reconstruction governor, and perhaps the era's most prominent "scalawag," or Southern white Republican.

In 1844 Alcorn moved to Mississippi, where he married a planter's daughter, and became one of the largest landowners in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta. In 1860, he strongly opposed secession. After serving briefly in the Confederate army, Alcorn retired to his plantation.

At the end of the Civil War, Alcorn broke with his state's political leadership by advocating limited black suffrage and supporting the Fourteenth Amendment. In 1867, he joined the Republican party, insisting that only if men like himself took the lead in Reconstruction could a "harnessed revolution" take place. Blacks' rights would be respected, but political power would remain in white hands.

Elected governor in 1869, Alcorn appointed many white Democrats to office and opposed civil rights legislation. Black leaders and carpetbaggers became disaffected from his administration. Alcorn resigned in 1871 to take a seat in the U.S. Senate. Two years later, alarmed by blacks' increasing political assertiveness, he again ran for governor, this time with Democratic support. He was defeated by Adelbert Ames.

After Reconstruction, Alcorn remained a Republican. But as a delegate to the constitutional convention of 1890, he supported the clause taking the right to vote away from Mississippi blacks, perhaps hoping to restore white domination of his party.

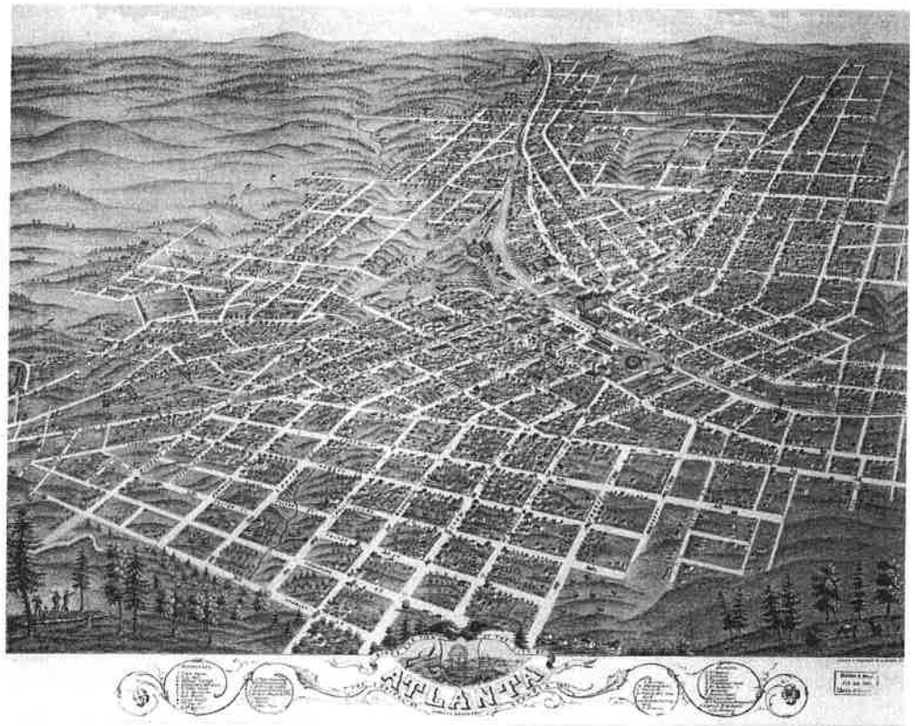


Advertisement for the Savannah and Charleston Railroad from the Charleston City Directory, 1878. **(South Carolina Historical Society)**

Reconstruction governments of the South believed that the development of a regional railroad system with links to Northern markets would create a more diversified economy with opportunites for blacks and whites alike. Although thousands of miles of track were laid during Reconstruction, the program never realized its goals, partly because Northern investors preferred economic opportunities in the West.

blacks from both public and private facilities, was widespread throughout the country. Black demands for the outlawing of such discrimination produced deep divisions in the Republican party. But in the Deep South, where blacks made up the vast majority of the Republican voting population, laws were enacted making it illegal for railroads, hotels, and other institutions to discriminate on the basis of race. Enforcement of these laws varied considerably from locality to locality, but Reconstruction established for the first time at the state level a standard of equal citizenship and a recognition of blacks' right to a share of public services.

Republican governments also took steps to assist the poor of both races and to promote the South's economic recovery. The Black Codes were repealed, the property of small farmers protected against being seized for debt, and the tax system revised to shift the burden from propertyless blacks, who had paid a disproportionate share during Presidential Reconstruction, to planters and other landowners. The former slaves, however, were disappointed that little was done to assist them in acquiring land. Only South Carolina took effective action, establishing a commission to purchase land for resale on long-term credit to poor families.



Bird's-Eye View of the City of Atlanta, *lithograph by A. Ruger, 1871.*
(Library of Congress)

Atlanta, captured and burned by Union troops in 1864, rebuilt itself after the Civil War. Located at the juncture of several railroad lines, the city attracted new businesses, and its population tripled to about 21,000 people by 1870. Adding to its status, Atlanta became the state capital in 1868.

Simeon Corley

Simeon Corley, congressman from South Carolina. (Library of Congress)

Born in South Carolina, Simeon Corley (1823–1902) exemplified the connection among some white Southerners between prewar Unionism, hostility to the planter elite, and support for Reconstruction.

Before the Civil War, Corley worked as a tailor and wrote columns for the *Southern Patriot*, in which he opposed disunion and supported the temperance movement. As he later recalled, he was "hated and despised" for his views, and demands were raised that he be expelled from the state. Nonetheless, in 1863, he was drafted into the Confederate army.

Corley opposed Andrew Johnson's Reconstruction policies for placing the South "again under the rule of . . . traitors." Appealing to voters as a representative of "the great laboring class," white and black, he was elected as a Republican to the constitutional convention of 1868, a term in Congress, and a number of local offices. Ordinary South Carolinians, he declared, should rejoice at the death of slavery, "that great curse to both races," and the removal from power of the state's old political leaders.

Corley held no further positions after the end of Reconstruction, but lived for the remainder of his life in his native state.

Adelbert Ames

Adelbert Ames, governor of Mississippi. (Library of Congress)

A native of Maine, Adelbert Ames (1835–1933) graduated in 1861 from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. He served with distinction in the Union Army, winning the Congressional Medal of Honor for bravery at the Battle of Bull Run.

Appointed by President Grant to command the fourth military district (including Mississippi) under the Reconstruction Act of 1867, Ames became convinced that he "had a Mission with a large M" to assist the former slaves. He appointed blacks to local offices and ordered that, for the first time in the state's history, they be eligible to serve on juries.

Elected to the U.S. Senate in 1870, Ames became leader of the Republican faction that opposed the moderate policies of Gov. James L. Alcorn. In 1873, black leaders urged Ames to run for governor, and he handily defeated Alcorn. As governor, Ames attempted to reduce the cost of government and make public land available to the former slaves.

In 1875, Democrats launched a violent campaign to win control of the Mississippi legislature. Ames appealed for federal intervention to restore order, but without success.

After the Democratic victory, Ames resigned as governor, returned to the North, and went into his father's flour-milling business. For the remainder of his life, he continued to defend his Reconstruction record, insisting that racial discrimination was "the curse of the world."

Rather than land distribution, the Reconstruction governments pinned their hopes for Southern economic growth and opportunity for African-Americans on a program of regional economic development. Railroad construction was its centerpiece, the key, they believed, to linking the South with Northern markets, and transforming the region into a society of booming factories, bustling towns, and diversified agriculture. "A free and living Republic," declared a Tennessee Republican, would "spring up in the track of the railroad." The plantation would lose its dominant role in the economy, and new opportunities for employment and the acquisition of property would emerge for black and white alike. Every state during Reconstruction helped to finance railroad construction, and through tax reductions and other incentives, tried to attract Northern manufacturers to invest in the region. The program had mixed results. A few states—Georgia, Alabama, Arkansas, and Texas—witnessed significant new railroad construction between 1868 and 1872, but economic development in general remained weak. With abundant opportunities existing in the West, few Northern investors ventured to the Reconstruction South.

Thus, to their supporters, the governments of Radical Reconstruction presented a complex pattern of achievement and disappointment. The economic vision of a modernizing, revitalized Southern economy failed to materialize, and most African-Americans remained locked in poverty. On the other hand, biracial democratic government, a thing unknown in American history, for the first time functioned effectively in many parts of the South. Public facilities were rebuilt and expanded, school systems established, and legal codes purged of racism. The conservative oligarchy that had dominated Southern government from colonial times to 1867 found itself largely excluded from political power, while those who had previously been outsiders—poorer white Southerners, men from the North, and especially former slaves—cast ballots, sat on juries, and enacted and administered laws. The effect upon African-Americans was strikingly visible. "One hardly realizes the fact that the many Negroes one sees here . . . ," a Northern correspondent reported in 1873, "have been slaves a few short years ago, at least as far as their demeanor goes as individuals newly invested with all the rights and privileges of an American citizen."

The South's traditional leaders—planters, merchants, and Democratic politicians—bitterly opposed the new Southern governments, denouncing them as corrupt, inefficient, and embodiments of wartime defeat and "black supremacy." There was corruption during Reconstruction, but it was confined to no race, region, or party. Frauds that existed in some Southern states, associated primarily with the new programs of railroad aid, were dwarfed by those practiced

Murder of Louisiana, *by A. Zenneck, 1873.* (Library of Congress)

A cartoon opposing Reconstruction depicts President Ulysses S. Grant preparing to sacrifice the state of Louisiana on the "Altar of Radicalism." The devil, represented by Attorney General George H. Williams, directs Grant. The victim, held by two black men, has already had his heart removed by Louisiana's Republican governor William P. Kellogg. Northern merchants and Southern states, led by South Carolina wrapped in chains, witness the event from either side.

in these years by the Whiskey Rings, which involved high officials of the Grant administration, and by New York's Tweed Ring, controlled by the Democrats, whose depredations ran into the tens of millions of dollars.

The rising taxes needed to pay for schools and other new public facilities, and to assist railroad development, were another cause of opposition to Reconstruction. Planters resented the new tax systems, which forced them to bear a far higher share of the tax burden than in the past. Many poorer whites who had initially supported the Republican party turned against it when it became clear that their economic situation was not improving under the new governments.

THE BLACK VOMIT;

Or, The Bottom Rail on Top.

A new Farce composed by a Committee appointed from De-league, was played successfully for two days in Lynchburg. The principal characters were sustained by Kelso, Williams'son and other Black and White vultures specially imported for the purpose. ☞ This play is taken from scenes in Pandemonium, and has been arranged and put on the Stage for the purpose of inaugerating "HELL IN VIRGINIA."

"Two heads without a single thought."
"Two black hearts that beat as one."

The Camels Are Coming

Mongrels on their way to C. C. H.

The Representative from Lynchburg makes a Speech.

When Shall we THREE Meet Again!
In de Convenshun.

HAIR DRESSED, BOOTS BLACKED, CURLS MIXED AND SKEINED!!

The Black Vomit; Or, the Bottom Rail on Top, ***broadside, c. 1870.*** **(Library of Congress)**

Shortly after Republicans gained control of state governments in the South, Democrats launced a widespread campain to oust them. A broadside from Virginia illustrates the extent to which they used racism as a political tool. "Bottom Rail on Top" refers to a phrase coined by a former slave describing the status of black Americans after the Civil War. Democrats regained full control of Virginia in 1873.

The most basic reason for opposition to Reconstruction, however, was that most white Southerners could not accept the idea of former slaves voting, holding office, and enjoying equality before the law. They had always regarded blacks as an inferior race whose proper place was as dependent laborers. Reconstruction, they believed, had to be overthrown in order to restore white supremacy in Southern government, and to ensure planters a disciplined, reliable labor force. Even Southern Democrats like Benjamin H. Hill of Georgia,

Benjamin H. Hill, engraving by Illman Brothers Engravers, c. 1870.
(University of Georgia)

Benjamin Hill, a planter, lawyer, and legislator from Georgia, became spokesman for the New Departure, a movement among Democrats to regain political control of the South. Hill claimed to have a moderate approach to racial issues, and advocated a mixed economy of small farms, diversified agriculture, and modern industry. Hill believed that only the South's traditional leadership could enact such programs, not blacks, scalawags, or carpetbaggers.

who believed the Civil War had demonstrated "the superiority of Yankee civilization," and who accepted the premise that the South must move from a plantation-oriented economy to one of small farms and developing industry, insisted that such policies could only be carried out by the region's traditional leaders, not blacks, carpetbaggers, and scalawags.

In 1869 and 1870, Democrats joined with dissident Republicans to win control of Tennessee and Virginia, effectively ending Reconstruction there. Elsewhere in the South, however, with Reconstruction governments securely entrenched, their opponents turned to a campaign of widespread violence in an effort to end Republican rule. Their actions soon posed a fundamental challenge both for Reconstruction governments in the South and for policymakers in Washington.

Albion W. Tourgée

Albion W. Tourgée, North Carolina jurist.
(Library of Congress)

Throughout his long career, carpetbagger Albion W. Tourgée (1838–1905) advocated equal rights for African-Americans. Born on an Ohio farm, he attended the University of Rochester before serving in the Union Army. He was twice wounded and spent four months in Confederate prisons.

After the war, Tourgée moved with his wife to North Carolina, where he became involved in Reconstruction politics. At the constitutional convention of 1868, he was instrumental in democratizing the state's local government and judicial system.

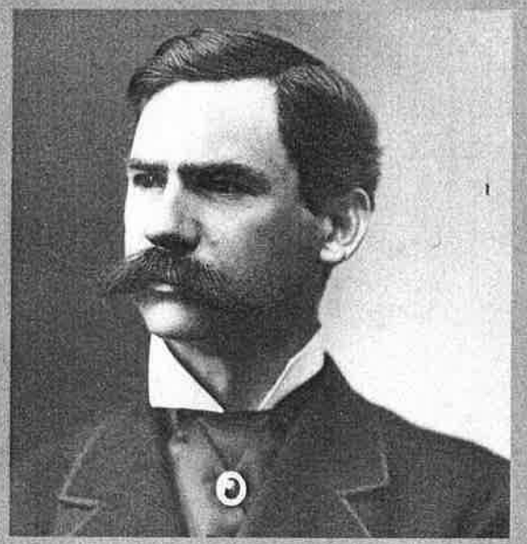
As a superior court judge during Reconstruction, Tourgée courageously challenged the Ku Klux Klan. His appeals to Congress revealing the extent of violence helped speed passage of laws authorizing the use of troops against the Klan.

After 1877, Tourgée returned to the North, where he expressed his disappointment over the failure of Reconstruction in *A Fool's Errand,* a partly autobiographical account of a young carpetbagger's career. The book became a bestseller, and Tourgée wrote several other popular novels.

In 1896, Tourgée served without fee as attorney for Homer A. Plessy, who challenged a Louisiana law requiring the racial segregation of railroad cars. By denying blacks equal protection of the law, Tourgée argued, segregation violated the Fourteenth Amendment. In *Plessy v. Ferguson,* the Supreme Court upheld the law and announced the principle of "separate but equal." Not until 1954, in the *Brown v. Board of Education* school segregation decision, did the Court adopt Tourgée's earlier reasoning.

Tourgée spent his last years serving as U.S. consul at Bordeaux, France, were he died.

Henry C. Warmoth



Henry C. Warmoth, governor of Louisiana.
(Library of Congress)

The career of Henry C. Warmoth (1842–1931), Louisiana's first Republican governor, illustrates some of the less attractive features of Reconstruction politics.

A native of Illinois, Warmoth was working as a lawyer in Missouri when the Civil War began. He joined the Union Army in 1862 and went to Louisiana two years later as judge of the provost court. Warmoth quickly plunged into politics and was active in the formation of the state's Republican party.

In 1868, at the youthful age of twenty-six, Warmoth was elected governor and was reelected in 1870. His term in office was marked by intense party factionalism, caused by differences over policy (Warmoth opposed civil rights legislation and appointed Democrats to office), and battles between blacks and whites, and Northern- and Southern-born Republicans, for governmental positions. Corruption became widespread, and Warmoth himself received bribes from railroad companies seeking state aid.

In 1872, Warmoth joined the Liberal Republicans and supported Horace Greeley for President. After Greeley's defeat, Warmoth was impeached and suspended from office. His black lieutenant governor, P. B. S. Pinchback, replaced him.

Warmoth remained in Louisiana for the rest of his life, serving as collector of customs at New Orleans, 1890–93, and operating a successful sugar plantation.