

## CHAPTER 9

# Reconstruction: The Making and Unmaking of a Revolution

1865–1877

**CHRONOLOGY** *Events specific to African American history are in purple. General U.S. history events are in black.*

<b>1865</b>	General William T. Sherman issues Special Field Order 15 Freedmen's Bureau founded Freedman's Savings and Trust Company founded Southern states pass black codes Ku Klux Klan founded Thirteenth Amendment abolishes slavery	<b>1870</b>	Fifteenth Amendment guarantees black male suffrage Force Act gives federal troops authority to put down racial disorder Hiram Revels becomes first African American U.S. senator
<b>1866</b>	Civil Rights Act defines U.S. citizenship and overturns black codes Congress reauthorizes Freedmen's Bureau with expanded powers Southern Homestead Act Two black cavalry regiments and two black infantry regiments established American Equal Rights Association founded	<b>1872</b>	Fisk Jubilee Singers perform at White House Freedmen's Bureau disbanded
<b>1867–1868</b>	Reconstruction Acts	<b>1873</b>	Colfax Massacre <i>Slaughterhouse Cases</i> ; U.S. Supreme Court limits Fourteenth Amendment
<b>1868</b>	President Andrew Johnson impeached; Senate fails to convict him Fourteenth Amendment defines and guarantees equal citizenship Radical Republican Thaddeus Stevens dies	<b>1874</b>	Freedman's Savings and Trust Company fails Radical Republican Charles Sumner dies Robert Smalls elected to U.S. House of Representatives
<b>1869</b>	National Woman Suffrage Association founded American Woman Suffrage Association founded Knights of Labor founded Isaac Myers helps found Colored National Labor Union	<b>1875</b>	Civil Rights Act requires equal treatment of whites and blacks in public accommodations and on public conveyances
		<b>1876</b>	Hamburg Massacre Presidential election disputed
		<b>1877</b>	Disputed election resolved; deal results in federal troops being withdrawn from South Henry O. Flipper becomes first black West Point graduate

## **Jourdon and Mandy Anderson Find Security in Freedom after Slavery**

In the summer after the Civil War ended, freedman Jourdon Anderson of Dayton, Ohio, thought hard about the postwar prospects for himself and his wife, Mandy, and their three children. Colonel P. H. Anderson, their “Old Master” in Big Spring, Tennessee, “promising to do better for me than anybody else can,” and asked Jourdon and his family to return to the “old home” to work for him. Free since 1864, Jourdon and Mandy had made a nice life for themselves and their family in Dayton. “I get \$25 a month, with victuals and clothing; have a comfortable home for Mandy . . . and the children,” Jourdon explained in his formal response to Colonel Anderson’s invitation. Recalling that Anderson had more than once tried to shoot him, Jourdon demanded “some proof that you are sincerely disposed to treat us justly and kindly” as a condition of return. The terms Jourdon and Mandy laid out were clear and precise:

We have concluded to test your sincerity by asking you to send us our wages for the time we served you. This will make us forget and forgive old scores, and rely on your justice and friendship in the future. I served you faithfully for thirty-two years and Mandy twenty years. At \$25 a month for me, and \$2 a week for Mandy, our earnings would amount to \$11,680. Add to this the interest for the time our wages has been kept back and deduct what you paid for our clothing and three

doctor’s visits to me, and pulling a tooth for Mandy, and the balance will show what we are in justice entitled to. Please send the money by Adams Express, in care of V. Winters, esq., Dayton, Ohio. If you fail to pay us for faithful labors in the past we can have little faith in your promises in the future. We trust the good Maker has opened your eyes to the wrongs which you and your fathers have done to me and my fathers, in making us toil for you for generations without recompense.

Besides making sure that their economic situation would be solid, Jourdon and Mandy wanted to know that their domestic and social lives as free people would be protected and dignified. The old patterns of white dominance and black subordination were unacceptable. Jourdon observed that when “the folks here” talk to Mandy, they “call her Mrs. Anderson.” Jourdon and Mandy demanded that their daughters Milly and Jane, “now grown up and both good-looking girls,” be safe from rape and sexual exploitation at the hands of white men. “I would rather stay here and starve and die if it comes to that than have my girls brought to shame by the violence and wickedness of their young masters.” Mandy and Jourdon were also very proud of their son Grundy, whose teacher had told them that Grundy “has a head for a preacher.” They made certain their children attended Sunday school and church, as well as grammar school. Committed to a good education for their children, they asked Colonel Anderson “if there has been any schools opened

for the colored children in your neighborhood.” Jourdon explained, “The great desire of my life now is to give my children an education, and have them form virtuous habits.”<sup>1</sup>

Jourdon Anderson’s extraordinary response to his former master’s request that he and his family come back to work on the old homestead pointedly reveals the concerns of African Americans as they built new lives for themselves in freedom. Family ties, church and community, dignified labor with fair compensation, and education for their children were top priorities. But these were neither safe nor protected in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, as many white landowners sought to ensure that former slaves continued working the land and remained bound by white rule. The tension between black assertiveness and white racism made interracial conflict inevitable. Freedom brought a revolution in black economic, social, and political life, but it did not bring equality. As President Andrew Johnson and the Radical Republicans in Congress battled over executive

and legislative power, the fate of the freedpeople hung in the balance. When Congress proved more powerful, laws and constitutional amendments sought to ensure African American civil and voting rights. For about a decade from 1867 to 1877, African Americans in the South, even more than in the North, actively and responsibly participated in public life. Intense, often violent, southern white opposition, coupled with a dwindling national concern for freedpeople as the country turned to economic development, undermined the revolutionary period of interracial democracy and the political gains black people had made during Reconstruction. Some left the South for other regions of the country, but wherever they tried to put down roots — in the U.S. military, in new all-black towns in Kansas and Oklahoma, and in northern and midwestern cities where they sought jobs in factories — they struggled to achieve equal rights and independent lives.

## A Social Revolution

For the four million African Americans who had been enslaved, freedom brought new goals and responsibilities. While the **Thirteenth Amendment** (December 1865) formally abolished slavery, the enslaved themselves had spearheaded their own emancipation by running to freedom behind Union lines, supporting the Union war effort, and undermining the Confederate war effort. Foremost for many after emancipation was reuniting with family members from whom they had been separated. Economic independence wrought immediate changes in family structure and shifting gender roles for men and women, as well as hope for the future. Extended families and community structures such as new schools and independent black churches provided services and support in the new environment of freedom. Labor arrangements had to be renegotiated, even though for most freedpeople, the nature of their work — field work and domestic

service — remained largely the same. In freedom, black people had the right to learn to read and write, and they eagerly pursued education. For those who had been enslaved, the first years of freedom involved a transition — from slave households to independent households and from slave labor to free labor — that constituted a social revolution.

## Freedom and Family

Freedpeople's struggles to create independent and functional families gave meaning to their freedom. Under slavery, masters had exercised significant control over slave families. With freedom, black people gained control over their families, even as they tried to remake them. Often the first step was to reunite those who had been separated before the war. One government official observed that "the work of emancipation was incomplete until the families which had been dispersed by slavery were reunited."<sup>2</sup> The war itself also had separated families. As individuals fled to Union lines and traveled with Union armies or enlisted in the U.S. Colored Troops, they lost touch with parents, spouses, children, and relatives who were themselves sometimes scattered. A Missouri official reported that after black men had enlisted in the military, their wives and children had been "driven from their masters['] homes," and court records indicate that women separated from children sought help to get them back.<sup>3</sup> In short, wartime conditions had made it increasingly hard to hold black families together.

After the war, thousands of freedpeople traveled great distances at significant material and emotional costs, seeking lost and displaced family members. One middle-aged North Carolina freedman who had been sold away from his wife and children traveled almost six hundred miles on foot to try to find them.<sup>4</sup> People inquired for missing relatives at former plantation homes, contraband camps, churches, and government agencies. Others wrote letters, and those who were not literate asked for help from teachers, preachers, missionaries, and government officials. Many took out ads in black newspapers.

Most searches were unsuccessful, owing to time and distance, death, and difficulties that were simply insurmountable, given the lack of records. Family members who did find one another expressed relief and joy. Reunited after having been sold apart twenty years earlier, husband and wife Ben and Betty Dodson embraced, and Ben shouted, "Glory! glory! hallelujah." In some cases, people did not recognize one another after such a long absence. One former slave woman, sold away as a child, could identify the woman standing before her as her mother only by a distinctive facial scar.<sup>5</sup>

Sometimes new family ties had replaced old ones. Many forcibly separated partners and spouses over time had come to believe they would never see each other again, and they formed new attachments. For them, reunions were heartrending. Some chose their former spouse; others, the new one. One woman gave each of her two husbands a two-week test run before settling on one. Many men stayed with and supported one wife while continuing to support the other.<sup>6</sup> Others remained torn between two loves. One freedman wrote to his first wife, "I thinks of you and my children every day of my



life. . . I do love you the same. My love to you have never failed. . . I have got another wife, and I am very sorry. . . You feels and seems to me as much like my dear loving wife, as you ever did.”<sup>7</sup>

The tensions following from troubled reunions often proved overwhelming. Many spouses who accused their partners of infidelity or desertion now sought relief through the courts. The number of wives seeking support for their children and themselves from negligent fathers and husbands increased, as did the number of divorce cases and custody battles over children. Battles between birth parents and the adults who had raised their children were confusing and painful for all involved. During slavery, some white mistresses had taken young slaves from their mothers to be raised in the big house as part of the domestic staff. After emancipation, these children were reclaimed. As one freed mother told her former mistress, “You took her away from me an’ didn’ pay no mind to my cryin’, so now I’s takin’ her back home. We’s free now, Mis’ Polly, we ain’t gwine be slaves no more to nobody.”<sup>8</sup>

Legalizing slave marriages was a critical step in confirming freedpeople’s new identities. Some viewed marriage as a moral and a Christian responsibility; some saw it as a means for legitimating children and becoming eligible for Union veterans’ pensions. Preachers, missionaries, and public officials supported marriage as a way to anchor black families and enhance their moral foundation. The rites themselves varied widely, from traditional “jumping the broom” ceremonies, common under slavery, to church weddings. One freedwoman recalled that while she and her husband had had a broomstick ceremony as slaves, once freed they “had a real sho’ nuff weddin’ wid a preacher. Dat cost a dollar.”<sup>9</sup> Mass weddings featuring as many as seventy couples were common. In 1866, seventeen North Carolina counties registered 9,000 marriages of freedpeople; four Virginia counties registered 3,000. Yet some couples remained together without formalizing their marriages, being accepted in their local communities as husband and wife.

Many former slaves took new names to recognize family ties and to symbolize their independence and their desire for a new life characterized by dignity and respect. In slavery, “we hardly knowed our names,” one ex-slave recalled. “We was cussed for so many bitches and sons of bitches and bloody bitches, and blood of bitches. We never heard our names scarcely at all.”<sup>10</sup> Masters had often assigned first names, such as Pompey and Caesar, and refused to recognize the surnames used within slave communities. Now, as independent people, former slaves legally claimed first and last names of their own choosing.

In form, freed families were flexible and adaptive. Although the most common organization was the nuclear family — two parents and their children — families often included extended kin and nonrelated members. Ties of affection and economic need made extended families important. Pooling resources and working collectively sustained these families. Even when dispersed in different households, families tended to live in communities among relatives. Close-knit communities defined women’s and men’s social and cultural worlds, nurturing a cooperative spirit and a communal folk culture.

Most newly freed families had to meet their household needs with very limited resources, and poverty rendered them fragile. Every person had to work. Immediately after emancipation, large numbers of freedwomen withdrew from field labor and domestic service to manage their own households, but most were soon forced to work outside the home for wages. Although traditional notions of women's and men's roles prevailed — woman as caretaker and homemaker; man as breadwinner and protector — black men by themselves rarely earned enough to support their families. One consequence was that black women who were contributing to the family income also participated more fully in family decision making. In addition, black women felt freer to leave dysfunctional relationships and to divorce or simply live apart from their husbands. But female-headed households were almost always poorer than dual-headed households. Moreover, as legal protectors and guarantors of their wives and children, freedmen exercised the rights of contract and child custody. Men typically made and signed labor contracts on behalf of their wives, and they held the upper hand in child custody disputes.

### Church and Community

The explosive growth of independent black churches in the South during this period reflects freedpeople's desire for dignity, autonomy, and self-expression as well as independent and affirmative religious lives. With emancipation, they rejected white Christianity and exited white churches by the thousands to form congregations of their own. As Matthew Gilbert, a Tennessee Baptist minister, noted, "The emancipation of the colored people made the colored churches and ministry a necessity, both by virtue of the prejudice existing against us and of our essential manhood before the laws of the land."<sup>11</sup> Often with the assistance of missionaries from churches in the North, the major black denominations — Baptist, African Methodist Episcopal (AME), and African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AME Zion) — became established in the South. By 1880, nationwide there were more than 500,000 people in the Baptist Church, 400,000 in the AME Church, and 250,000 in the AME Zion Church. By 1890, more than half of those belonging to independent black churches were Baptists.<sup>12</sup>

Next to the family, the black church provided the most important institutional support in the transition from slavery to freedom. Joining a church was an act of physical and spiritual emancipation, and black churches united black communities. They also empowered blacks because they operated outside white control. In addition, black churches anchored collective black identification — a sense of peoplehood, of nationhood. Men dominated church leadership, but women constituted most of the members and regular attendees and did most of what was called church work. Women gave and raised money, taught Sunday school, ran women's auxiliaries, welcomed visitors, and led social welfare programs for the needy, sick, and elderly. They were also prominent in domestic and foreign missionary activities. One grateful minister consistently offered "great praise" to the church sisters for all their hard work.<sup>13</sup>



### **The Black Church**

This 1876 sketch is an evocative presentation of a black church scene in which serious and well-dressed women, men, and children appear to be engaged in serious reflection on a biblical passage. While the preacher and his assistant are clearly leading the Bible study, the multiple settings within the scene enable us to focus on the congregants. The individuals and groupings — indeed, the collective image — convey authentic black Christian propriety. From *'The Illustrated London News,'* November 18, 1876/Private Collection/Bridgeman Images.

Women derived their authority in churches from their roles as Christian wives, mothers, “sisters,” and homemakers. As “church mothers,” they exercised informal yet significant influence in church affairs, including matters of governance typically reserved for male members, such as the selection of preachers and the allocation of church funds. Although women were not allowed to become preachers, many preached nevertheless, under titles such as “evangelist.”

Black women were also leaders in and practitioners of African-derived forms of popular, or folk, religion — such as conjure and voodoo, or hoodoo — which had evolved during slavery and continued after emancipation. Focusing on magic and the supernatural, they involved healing and harming beliefs and practices. One celebrated voodoo “priestess” was Marie Laveau of New Orleans. Not surprisingly, black church



leaders railed against folk religion as an ignorant and idolatrous relic of slavery. Still, these beliefs and practices were common, especially among rural people, but even in towns and cities and among Christians.

In black urban neighborhoods, church networks and resources helped fuel institutional growth, including hospitals, clinics, asylums for orphans and the mentally ill, mutual aid societies, lodges, and unions. Churches led black community efforts to deal with the epidemics of cholera, smallpox, and yellow fever that swept through the South after the war, especially as blacks who had never traveled much before became more exposed to lethal diseases. With help from the Medical Division of the Freedmen's Bureau, former wartime army hospitals were converted into hospitals to serve African Americans. In Washington, D.C., Freedmen's Hospital was established during the war. In New Orleans and Richmond, Virginia, the existing black hospitals expanded. By the late 1860s, segregated asylums and hospitals served black communities in a number of southern cities.

In addition, black churches, northern white churches, and the American Missionary Association (AMA) founded black grade schools and high schools during this period. They also established colleges and teacher training institutes, known as normal schools. These **historically black colleges and universities** reflected their founders' goals, giving great emphasis to religious instruction, Christian morality, and hard work, as well as academic and vocational training. (See Appendix: Historically Black Colleges and Universities, 1865–Present.)

Through their networks and resources, black churches generated a range of economic organizations. Each church operated as an economic enterprise, undertaking fundraising, buying and maintaining buildings and real estate, promoting businesses, and supporting social programs for the needy. Mutual aid societies rooted in churches evolved into black insurance companies and banks in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Church social circles provided ready consumer bases for black products and services. Some churches sold Christian products, such as Bibles and religious pamphlets and lithographs. Black ministers served on the boards of black companies. Churches sponsored business expositions featuring products such as furniture, medicines, and handicrafts to showcase African Americans' economic progress since emancipation.

The church was also the hub of black political life. At all levels — from within the church to local, state, and national politics — the church functioned as the key forum for political debate and action. It was vital to black political education and activism, including participation in black community politics and the white-dominated political mainstream. Among black ministers' many roles, that of political leader proved central. Preacher-politicians saw themselves both as faithful servants to their congregations and as representatives of their people to white politicians. They believed that their Christian-based leadership would improve the morality of both the political system and secular society. In the 1870s, the Reverend James Poindexter of the Second Baptist Church in Columbus, Ohio, explained that “all the help the preachers and all

other good and worthy citizens can give by taking hold of politics is needed in order to keep the government out of bad hands and secure the ends for which governments are formed.”<sup>14</sup>

## Land and Labor

Landownership was fundamental to former slaves’ aspirations for economic independence. Rebuilding families as independent households required land. Speaking for his people, particularly former slaves, in the summer of 1864, the AME missionary and minister Richard Cain explained, “We must possess the soil, be the owner of lands and become independent.”<sup>15</sup> This message was repeated in January 1865, when several hundred blacks in the Sea Islands told General William T. Sherman, “We want to be placed on land until we are able to buy it, and make it our own.”<sup>16</sup> As part of his **Special Field Order 15**, Sherman settled more than 40,000 former slaves in coastal areas that had been abandoned by Confederate plantation owners. Unfortunately, what was known as Sherman’s Reserve did not last. The Reconstruction plans of President Abraham Lincoln and his successor, Andrew Johnson, directed that former Confederates who swore allegiance to the United States would regain their land, and unclaimed land was auctioned to the highest bidder. Many former slaves were already working this land under federal supervision; others had simply squatted on abandoned land and worked it to sustain themselves. They were all evicted.

Although the **Freedmen’s Bureau** (1865–1872), the vital federal institution created to assist the freedpeople in their transition to freedom, was able to help some enter into contracts to rent the land they were already farming, the bureau was not able to help them purchase land. Few freedpeople or free blacks possessed the clout, capital, or credit to buy land, and as a result, they lost out to returning ex-Confederate plantation owners and northern and southern investors. The Southern Homestead Act, passed by Congress in 1866, made public land available to freedmen, but it had little impact and was repealed a decade later. In the end, most land in the former Confederacy was returned to white control, often to the original owners. The rest went to northern white investors, former army officers, and Freedmen’s Bureau officials.

This “landless emancipation” devastated freedpeople. “Damm such freedom as that,” one angry freedman exclaimed, expressing the frustration of many.<sup>17</sup> Freedpeople believed that they had earned the right to own the land they and their ancestors had worked as slaves. They argued that freedom without provision for self-sufficiency was a shocking violation of the federal government’s economic and moral responsibility. A group of Mississippi blacks called it “a breach of faith on the part of the government.”<sup>18</sup> Some simply refused to leave the property they now considered their own. The former slaves on the Taylor farm in Norfolk County, Virginia, mounted an armed resistance when their former owners returned to reclaim their prewar property, but to no avail. Forced evictions of freedpeople from land and farms they assumed now belonged to them were common.

Lacking the means to own land, most freedpeople were forced into tenancy. They rented and worked land that belonged to white landowners under terms that favored the owners. Black male heads of household entered into contracts with landowners that spelled out the wage or paid labor, as opposed to slave or unfree labor relationship. For their part, freedpeople sought fair compensation for their labor, work organized along family lines, and an end to physical punishment and gang-style labor with overseers. They also wanted guaranteed leisure time and the right to hunt, fish, gather wild food plants, raise farm animals, and cultivate designated plots for their own use. For white landowners, the aim of these contracts was to ensure a steady supply of farm labor so that their landholdings, planted in cash crops, would make a profit. That meant limiting wages, forbidding worker mobility, and suppressing competition. Labor contracts were difficult to break, and because most freedmen could neither read nor write, many relied on Freedmen's Bureau officials to look out for their best interests. The labor contract battles between freedpeople and landowners were at times bitter and divisive, but in the end, the landowners were far more powerful, and labor contracts generally favored their interests.

Despite their landholdings, whites operated within cash-strapped southern economies after the war. Instead of paying farmworkers in cash, most negotiated **sharecropping** arrangements under which farmers worked the land for a "share" of the crop, typically one-third or one-half. Often the landowner supplied the cabin or house in which the family lived, as well as seed, work animals, and tools. If a "cropper" had his own mule and plow, he might warrant a larger share of the crop. This share he would "sell" to the plantation owner or a local merchant — often the same person — following the harvest. But instead of cash changing hands, the sharecropper would get credit to use for buying food and clothing — or whatever his family might need — from the merchant. At the end of the year, when accounts were settled on "countin' day," the sharecropper usually got no more than a bill showing how much he still owed the landowner or merchant.

All too often, owners and merchants cheated workers, forcing them into a pattern of cyclical debt. Even many black farmers who owned their own land were forced into debt. For example, in a system known as **crop lien**, they had to borrow against anticipated harvests for seed and supplies. Most black households were thus reduced to a form of coerced labor, a kind of partial slavery, tied to the land they farmed as the only means they had to work off their debt, which every year grew larger instead of smaller. Debtors were also subject to imprisonment, and prisoners were subject to another form of coerced labor, as states contracted out their labor to landowners or businesses in need of a labor force. This **convict lease** system generated income for southern states, but it forced prisoners to work under slave-like conditions that blatantly disregarded their human rights.

Immediately after the war, the main goal for white southerners was to reassert control over blacks. State legislatures passed **black codes** that enforced the labor contracts that once again bound freedpeople, who had few other options, to the land. The codes



mandated strict obedience to white employers and set work hours, usually sunup to sundown. Although the codes allowed freedpeople to legalize their marriages, own property, make contracts, and access the courts, their aim was to perpetuate a slave-like labor force in conditions of freedom: a kind of neo-slavery. Vagrancy provisions were especially oppressive. Individuals without labor contracts who were unable to prove that they were employed risked fines, imprisonment, and forced labor, as did those who left a job before a contract ended or who were unruly or simply lost. In Mississippi, freedpeople were prohibited from renting urban property, helping to ensure that they would stay on plantations and work in agriculture. In Florida, breaking a labor contract often resulted in physical punishment, such as a whipping, or being hired out for a year to a planter. As one southern white pointedly observed in November 1865, the purpose behind black codes and vagrancy laws was to “teach the negro that if he goes to work, keeps his place, and behaves himself, he will be protected by *our* white laws.”<sup>19</sup>

Black codes also permitted the courts to order apprenticeships that removed children from black families and bound them to white employers, often without their parents’ or guardians’ consent. In *Adeline Brown v. State* (1865), the Maryland Court of Appeals upheld the state’s black apprentice law. Two years later, however, the case *In re Turner* (1867) overturned the law as unconstitutional because its educational provisions for black youths were different from those for white youths.

### The Hope of Education

To operate as free and independent men and women, former slaves — more than 90 percent of whom were illiterate at the moment of emancipation — recognized that they had to learn to read and write, and they did so eagerly. Some began their schooling in the Union military or in contraband camps, where they were sometimes taught by former slaves, such as Susie King Taylor, or by northern black women, such as Charlotte Forten, who went to the Sea Islands to teach. After the war, many makeshift classrooms grew into permanent institutions. On St. Helena Island, so many teachers were from Pennsylvania that the school was named the Penn School, and it expanded to accommodate 1,700 students on a campus that served black children into the 1940s. In Hampton, Virginia, where thousands of contrabands set up their own community soon after the Civil War began, the teacher was a free black woman named Mary S. Peake. Under the sponsorship of the AMA, she began her school under a tree later known as the Emancipation Oak. After she died of tuberculosis, General Benjamin Butler stepped in to build the Butler School for Negro Children, again with the assistance of the AMA. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, who before the war had lectured on behalf of abolition and black education, captured the excitement and sense of independence that came with achieving literacy. In Harper’s 1872 poem “Learning to Read,” the narrator, an elderly freeperson, is overjoyed by the prospect of literacy: “So I got a pair of glasses,/And straight to work I went,/And never stopped till I could read/The

**Frances Ellen Watkins Harper**

Freeborn Frances Ellen Watkins Harper was an influential abolitionist and women's rights advocate, a poet and novelist, and an orator. Her well-received *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* (1854) treated gender equality as well as abolitionism. *Minnie's Sacrifice* (1869), a serial novel; *Sketches of Southern Life* (1872), a book of poetry; and her most famous work, the novel *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* (1892), all address Reconstruction. Harper's life and work reflect a profound belief in and active commitment to both gender and racial equality. In particular, her activism on behalf of both women's rights and black rights led her to become a founding vice president of the National Association of Colored Women in 1896. *Granger/Granger—All rights reserved.*



hymns and Testament./Then I got a little cabin—/A place to call my own—/And I felt as independent/As the queen upon her throne.”<sup>20</sup>

Northern teachers, missionaries, and philanthropists helped found hundreds of schools for black children and adults. Some of these schools were set up in churches and homes. In other cases, freedpeople pooled their resources to buy land, build schoolhouses, and hire teachers. The Freedmen's Bureau assisted by renting facilities, providing books, and transporting teachers, and the AMA helped fund schools and hire teachers, white and black. The Pennsylvania Branch of the American Freedmen's Union Commission sent out 1,400 teachers to serve 150,000 students. In addition to these privately sponsored organizations, Reconstruction state governments, often led by black officials, began to establish public school systems — new for the South — that gave black children access to education, largely in segregated schools that operated only during the winter months, when children were not needed for planting and harvesting. By 1880 black illiteracy had declined to 70 percent, and by 1910 it was down to 30 percent.<sup>21</sup>

In all these schools, the standard New England curriculum prevailed. The three Rs — reading, writing, and arithmetic — were emphasized. In the best schools, instruction in history, geography, spelling, grammar, and music might also be available. Colleges offered a classical liberal curriculum that included math, science, Latin, and Greek. Given the pressing need for teachers, they usually emphasized teacher

training, instructing young people in teaching methods and theory as well as diction, geometry, algebra, and map reading.

By 1868, more than half the teachers in black schools in the South were black, and most were women. For them, teaching was a calling, not just a job. “I am myself a colored woman,” noted Sarah G. Stanley, “bound to that ignorant, degraded, long enslaved race, by the ties of love and consanguinity; they are socially, and politically, ‘my people.’”<sup>22</sup> The increasing preponderance of black teachers reflected a growing race consciousness and commitment to self-reliance. Despite the fact that white teachers may have had better training and more experience, black communities preferred black teachers. The Reverend Richard Cain observed that white “teachers and preachers have feelings, but not as we feel for our kindred.”<sup>23</sup> In 1869, a group of blacks in Petersburg, Virginia, petitioned the school board to replace white teachers with black ones, asserting, “We do not want our children to be trained to think or feel that they are inferior.”<sup>24</sup> Black female teachers became important community leaders and inspirational role models. Like black schools, they helped build racial solidarity and community identity.

Although the historically black colleges and universities emphasized teacher training, early on they took two different curricular paths that reflected the different expectations freedpeople had for themselves in light of their opportunities. Schools such as Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, founded in 1866, embraced the classical liberal arts model, whereas schools such as Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia, founded in 1868, adopted the vocational-industrial model. When Booker T. Washington helped found Tuskegee Institute in 1881, he modeled it on Hampton, where he had been a student and teacher. In 1871, Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College (Alcorn A&M) opened as Alcorn University in Claiborne County, Mississippi. Alcorn was both the nation’s first state-supported college for blacks and the first federal land-grant black college.

Fisk offered a well-rounded academic program to prepare the best and the brightest of the race for citizenship, leadership, and a wide range of careers. The school boldly aimed for “the highest standards, not of Negro education, but of American education at its best.”<sup>25</sup> Within six years, however, Fisk faced a serious financial crisis that threatened its survival. In an effort to raise money, George L. White, school treasurer and music professor, organized a choral ensemble to go on a fundraising tour. Modeling their performances on European presentation styles, but singing slave songs and spirituals little known to white audiences, the Fisk Jubilee Singers were soon famous. In 1872, they performed for President Ulysses S. Grant at the White House, and the next year, while on a European tour, they sang for Britain’s Queen Victoria. The money they raised saved the school from bankruptcy and enabled Fisk to build its first permanent building, Jubilee Hall, today a National Historic Landmark. Their performances built worldwide respect and admiration for African American music and culture and inspired other black colleges to create similar groups.

Hampton Institute had a different mission: “to train selected Negro youth who should go out and teach and lead their people first by example, by getting land and





### **The Fisk Jubilee Singers**

This 1880 photograph illustrates the middle-class refinement of the Fisk Jubilee Singers. This sense of middle-class respectability also revealed the singers' commitment to racial uplift: the presentation of positive images of blacks as a way to enhance their freedom struggle. As former slaves and the children of former slaves, the Jubilee Singers pioneered an African American music tradition that relied on polished versions of slave spirituals. Their noble presentation of this black religious folk music provided a critical counterpoint and challenge to negative stereotypes of blacks resulting from the minstrel tradition. Over time, the Jubilee Singers' performances for audiences around the world enhanced black and white respect for blacks and their culture. *Granger/Granger — All rights reserved.*

homes; . . . to teach respect for labor, . . . and in this way to build up an industrial system for the sake not only of self-support and intelligent labor, but also for the sake of character."<sup>26</sup> Samuel Chapman Armstrong, Hampton's white founder and Booker T. Washington's mentor, believed that training young people in skilled trades, rather than teaching a classical liberal arts curriculum, would best enable poverty-stricken former slaves to pull themselves up by their bootstraps. As skilled laborers and highly trained domestic servants, they would earn adequate wages, build self-respect, and win the admiration of whites. Students at Hampton paid their way by working on campus, which helped them learn the occupational skills that would qualify them for jobs after graduation. Many learned to teach trade skills such as carpentry and sewing, and

they practice-taught at the successor to the Butler School for Negro Children. The Hampton model of vocational training was akin to that of training schools for poor white children and immigrants at the time, but some black leaders feared that it would perpetuate black subordination. The *Louisianian*, a black newspaper, complained that Armstrong “seems to think that we should only know enough to make good servants.”<sup>27</sup> The debate over vocational training versus liberal arts intensified toward the end of the century, and at its center was Washington, the preeminent black leader of his day.

## A Short-Lived Political Revolution

Even as black men and women built independent lives, they sought a place in American public life, and for a short period known as **Black Reconstruction**, black men were able to vote in the South and to participate in politics. Radical Republicans in Congress had taken charge of Reconstruction and forced the former Confederate states to hold democratically elected constitutional conventions, which wrote new state constitutions that protected black suffrage. The consequences were revolutionary. Nowhere else in the world had an emancipated people been integrated into the political system so quickly. Black men elected or appointed to state and local offices proved able and moderate and demonstrated their interest in compromise and progressive reforms such as public schools. But Black Reconstruction was short-lived. Outraged southern whites mobilized a violent and racist counterrevolution that restored white political dominance by 1877. Congress and the Republican Party abandoned black interests, and the U.S. Supreme Court reversed gains made by Reconstruction laws and amendments. In its retreat from Black Reconstruction, the national government reflected the expanding white opposition to the evolving black freedom struggle.

### The Political Contest over Reconstruction

Andrew Johnson, who became president after Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, continued Lincoln’s lenient policies toward former Confederates. Like Lincoln, Johnson insisted that the war was an insurrection, that the southern states were never out of the Union, and that the organization of a new civil authority in these states was an executive, not a legislative, function. His rapid restoration of civil government in the former Confederate states, amnesty for former Confederates, and lack of interest in protecting the civil rights of freedpeople angered the Radical Republicans in Congress. This faction, led by Representative Thaddeus Stevens and Senator Charles Sumner, had pressed for more aggressive military campaigns during the war and a quicker end to slavery. Challenging Lincoln, it had run John C. Frémont against him for the presidency in 1864 and passed the Wade-Davis Bill aiming to reverse Lincoln’s proposed leniency toward Confederates. In December 1865, when Johnson declared that the Union had been restored and it looked as though representatives and senators from

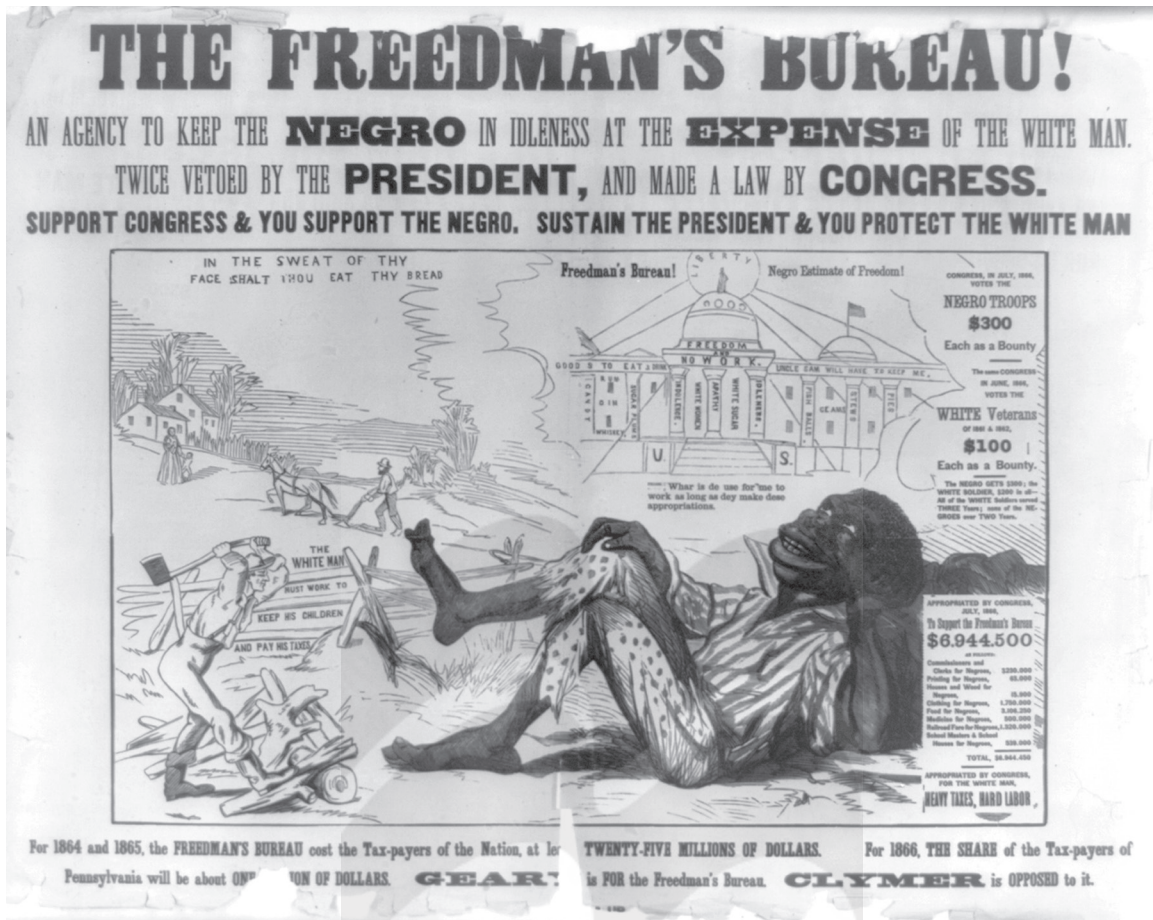
former Confederate states would be reseated in Congress, the Radical Republicans balked. Concerned for the civil rights of the freedpeople, they quickly appointed a joint committee to examine issues of suffrage and representation for the former Confederate states. The struggle between the president and Congress escalated in early 1866 when Congress passed two bills over Johnson's veto: the reauthorization of the Freedmen's Bureau and the Civil Rights Act.

Established in March 1865, the Freedmen's Bureau aimed to help freedpeople in their economic, social, and political transition to freedom. To prevent them from becoming wards of the state and the bureau from becoming a permanent guardian, it remained a temporary agency that Congress had to renew annually. In reauthorizing the Freedmen's Bureau in February 1866, Congress expanded its powers by establishing military commissions to hear cases of civil rights abuses — of which there were many. The bureau heard shocking reports of whites violently beating and abusing blacks (even murdering them), cheating them out of their wages, short-changing them on purchased goods, and stealing their crop shares. In September 1865, for example, the head of the Freedmen's Bureau in Mississippi reported, "Men, who are honorable in their dealings with their white neighbors, will cheat a negro without feeling a single twinge of their honor; to kill a negro they do not deem murder; to debauch a negro woman they do not think fornication; to take property away from a negro they do not deem robbery. . . . They still have the ingrained feeling that the black people at large belong to the whites at large."<sup>28</sup> When Johnson vetoed the reauthorization bill, stating that the military commissions were unconstitutional, Congress passed the bill over his veto. The bureau experienced severe cutbacks in 1869, however, and its reach and effectiveness seriously declined before it was finally ended in 1872.

To further protect the civil rights of freedpeople, Congress passed the **Civil Rights Act of 1866**, again over Johnson's veto. This act defined U.S. citizenship for the first time and affirmed that all citizens were equally protected by the laws. It overturned black codes and ensured that blacks could make contracts and initiate lawsuits, but it did not protect black voting rights. In February 1866, Frederick Douglass and a delegation of other black leaders met with Johnson to try to convince him of the importance of black suffrage, but without success.

Tensions between the stubborn and increasingly isolated Johnson and an energetic Congress escalated over the **Fourteenth Amendment**, which Congress quickly proposed and sent to the states for ratification in 1866. Ratified in 1868, this amendment affirmed the Civil Rights Act's definition of citizenship and guarantee of "equal protection of the laws" to all citizens. Declaring that "all persons born or naturalized in the United States" are "citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside," it reversed the *Dred Scott* decision of 1857, which had ruled that blacks could not be citizens. To protect citizens against civil rights violations by the states, the amendment also declared that "no State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges and immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any





### Freedmen's Bureau Cartoon

This vicious Democratic Party broadside from 1866 slanders the Freedmen's Bureau as well as freedpeople. Central to the party's widespread effort to get rid of the Freedmen's Bureau specifically and of Reconstruction in its entirety was a racist, vitriolic, and highly calculated public campaign against both. This broadside is a chilling representation of the discredited view that Reconstruction was a tragic mistake because it did too much too soon for the inferior and uncivilized freedpeople, who were incapable of shouldering the responsibilities of freedom. *Library of Congress, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Washington, D.C./LC-USZ-62-57340.*

State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws." This clause would ultimately shape the black freedom struggle, but not before states found ways to craft racially discriminatory laws and practices in the areas in which states were sovereign, such as public education.

Outmaneuvered, Johnson took his case to the people, embarking on an unprecedented presidential speaking tour, which proved disastrous. In the midterm elections

of 1866, the Radical Republicans captured two-thirds of both houses of Congress, and the next year they moved quickly to take charge of Reconstruction by passing several Reconstruction Acts. The first **Reconstruction Act of 1867**, passed on March 2, 1867, dissolved state governments in the former Confederacy (except for Tennessee) and divided the old Confederacy into five military districts subject to martial law, each with a military governor. To reenter the Union, a state was required to call a constitutional convention, which would be elected by universal male suffrage (including black male suffrage); to write a new state constitution that guaranteed black suffrage; and to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment. The other three Reconstruction Acts passed in 1867 and early 1868 empowered the military commander of each district to ensure that the process of reconstruction in each state went forward despite strong ex-Confederate opposition.

On March 2, 1867, Congress also passed — and later passed again, over Johnson's veto — the Tenure of Office Act, which prohibited the president from removing any cabinet member from office without the Senate's approval. The act was designed to protect Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, a Radical Republican who was openly critical of the president. When Johnson dismissed Stanton in February 1868, the House of Representatives impeached Johnson for this violation of the act and other charges. The Senate failed to convict him, but thereafter the president was politically sidelined, and Congress assumed primary responsibility for Reconstruction.

## Black Reconstruction

By early March 1867, the military Reconstruction of the South was already under way. Many former Confederates were ineligible to vote in elections for delegates to state constitutional conventions, and up to 30 percent of whites refused to participate in elections in which black men could vote. Thus in some states, black voters were in the majority. Of the slightly more than 1,000 delegates elected to write new state constitutions, 268 were black. In South Carolina and Louisiana, blacks formed the majority of delegates. Black delegates advocated the interests of freedpeople specifically and of the people of their states and the nation generally. They also argued for curtailing the interests of caste and property. In South Carolina, for example, delegate Robert Smalls proposed that the state sponsor a public school system that was open to all.

The state constitutional conventions initiated a new phase of Reconstruction. (See Document Project: The Vote, pp. 356–65.) Decades later, the black scholar and activist W. E. B. Du Bois called it “Black Reconstruction” in a book by that title. His subtitle, “An Essay toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America,” suggests a transformative yet short-lived revolutionary moment during which African Americans participated in southern political life. The constitutions these conventions drafted provided for a range of “firsts” for the South: universal male suffrage, public schools, progressive taxes, improved court and judicial systems, commissions to promote industrial development, state aid for railroad

development, and social welfare institutions such as hospitals and asylums for orphans and the mentally ill. In many ways, these were among the most progressive state constitutions and state governments the nation ever had, and they are why Du Bois called Reconstruction a “splendid failure”<sup>29</sup> — splendid for what could have been.

Du Bois also argued that Black Reconstruction was splendid because it did not fail due to alleged black incompetence and inferiority, as many whites expected. Instead, Black Reconstruction clearly demonstrated African American competence and equality. From the first, white southerners who did not participate in the conventions denigrated the black delegates as incompetent and the white delegates as “carpetbaggers” and “scalawags.” Carpetbaggers were northern whites who were stereotyped as having come to the South with their belongings in travel bags made from carpet. Their aim was allegedly to make money off plantation, railroad, and industrial interests as



### ***The First Colored Senator and Representatives, 1872***

This dignified group portrait represents the first black men to serve in Congress as statesmen as well as pioneering black political leaders. In the back row, from left to right, are Robert C. De Large (South Carolina) and Jefferson F. Long (Georgia). In the front row are Hiram R. Revels (Mississippi), Benjamin S. Turner (Alabama), Josiah T. Walls (Florida), Joseph H. Rainey (South Carolina), and Robert Brown Elliott (South Carolina). Except for Revels, who served in the Senate (1870–1871), all of these men served in the House of Representatives during the Forty-First (1869–1871) and/or Forty-Second Congress (1871–1873). *Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C., LC-DIG-ppmsca-17564.*



well as the freedpeople themselves. Scalawags were southern whites who had turned on their fellow white southerners and tied their fortunes to the Republican Party. Such charges were overstated. While Black Reconstruction politicians ranged from liberal to conservative, they were more centrist than radical, more committed to reintegrating former Confederates into the new state governments than punishing them for having waged war against the United States, and more than competent.

During Black Reconstruction, some 2,000 blacks served as officeholders at the various levels of government in the South.<sup>30</sup> Although a little over half for whom information is available had been slaves, they were now literate, and they were committed. Among them were artisans, laborers, businessmen, carpenters, barbers, ministers, teachers, editors, publishers, storekeepers, and merchants. They served as sheriffs, police officers, justices of the peace, registrars, city council members, county commissioners, members of boards of education, tax collectors, land office clerks, and postmasters. Wherever they served, they sought to balance the interests of black and white southerners. In a political era marked by graft and corruption, black politicians proved to be more ethical than their white counterparts.

A few black Republicans achieved high state office. In Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina, blacks served as lieutenant governor. Some were superintendents of education, a post with considerable power. More than six hundred state legislators were black, including Robert Smalls, who served in the South Carolina House of Representatives and Senate (Map 9.1). In 1874, Smalls was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. Thirteen other black men served in the U.S. House during this era, and two served in the Senate. Like their colleagues in local and state positions in the South, these black senators and congressmen were moderate politicians who tried hard to balance the often irreconcilable concerns of freedpeople and southern whites. Hiram R. Revels (1870–1871) and Blanche K. Bruce (1875–1881) were both senators from Mississippi. A minister in the AME Church, Revels was known for his oratorical ability and his amnesty program for disfranchised former Confederates, which would have allowed them to vote and hold office with limited penalties. Bruce, a skilled Mississippi delta politician and planter, proved to be a far more vigorous champion of black civil rights and an unyielding opponent of white resistance to black political participation.

The widespread political involvement of blacks, many of whom were former slaves who had never before had any political rights, was unprecedented in the United States and unique among nineteenth-century post-emancipation societies, including Jamaica, Cuba, and Brazil. In the United States, blacks' service in office, as well as the wide range of political activities of thousands of other black men and women, amounted to a political revolution. Black politics then and since has included innumerable local, grassroots, and community-based activities outside the realm of formal politics, activities aimed at enhancing black influence and control. Still, for the black community, political participation and the vote during Reconstruction represented key expressions of citizenship and national belonging. (See Document Project: The



**MAP 9.1 Black Political Participation in the Reconstruction South, 1867–1868**

During the overlapping years of Congressional Reconstruction and Black Reconstruction, the states of the former Confederacy were reorganized into five military districts under the first Reconstruction Act of 1867. Within these districts, for the first time ever, thousands of newly enfranchised blacks participated in politics, voted, and held elected offices at all levels of the government. As this map illustrates, the percentages of African Americans elected to the first state legislatures as a result of the four Reconstruction Acts were significant: Half of Louisiana's elected state legislators were black, and in South Carolina, black legislators comprised a 61 percent majority. ■ **What made black political participation at this particular moment "revolutionary"?** DATA SOURCE: *The Atlas of African-American History and Politics: From the Slave Trade to Modern Times*, by Arwin Smallwood and Jeffrey Elliot. Copyright © 1998 The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.

Vote, pp. 356–65.) When black men voted, they cast a family vote — a choice that reflected the collective aspirations of their wives, children, relatives, and extended kin, as well as those of their neighbors and communities.

Freedpeople allied themselves with the Republican Party, the party of emancipation and Abraham Lincoln. They were actively recruited by the **Union League**, which had been created in the North in 1862 to build support for the Republican Party and sent representatives to the South after the war. Along with the Freedmen's Bureau, southern branches of the Union League mobilized black support for the Republican Party and helped blacks understand their political rights and responsibilities as citizens.

African Americans viewed the right to vote as the most important of all civil rights and the one on which all other civil rights depended. The vote made economic, social, and political liberties possible and helped protect blacks. To ensure this right,

the overwhelmingly Republican U.S. Congress proposed the **Fifteenth Amendment** in 1869, and it was ratified the next year. It declared, “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”

The Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments — the Reconstruction Amendments — constituted what might be called, according to contemporary historian Eric Foner, a “second founding” of the United States: a revitalization of the late eighteenth-century creation of the nation, the “first founding.” Reconstruction as well as these constitutional amendments signified a powerful though tragically flawed historical moment dedicated to both advancing the ongoing African American freedom struggle and helping the United States realize its better self. The deeply inspiring egalitarian and democratic idealism of this “second founding” has influenced world history as well as U.S. history, from that time to today. The Republican, journalist, and politician Carl Schurz, who fought for the Union in the Civil War, labeled Reconstruction a “constitutional revolution” that gave new and enduring meaning to the rights of American citizens, particularly African Americans, freed and free.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, that extraordinary yet insufficiently recognized “constitutional revolution,” this “second founding,” has been the seedbed of the modern African American freedom struggle.

With the Fifteenth Amendment enfranchising African American men, many — including the prominent white abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison — believed that the federal government’s constitutional incorporation of blacks into the Union was complete and its formal responsibility to the former slaves fulfilled. Enforcement of the amendment was a separate issue, however, and to help clarify what equality meant, Senator Charles Sumner introduced one more civil rights bill. When passed after his death and partly in his memory, the **Civil Rights Act of 1875** required equal treatment in public accommodations and on public conveyances regardless of race: in effect a “public rights” guarantee. (See Appendix: Civil Rights Act of 1875 for the text of this federal law.)

By this time, however, most white Americans thought the freedpeople should be on their own and feared that further government efforts on their behalf would only undermine their self-reliance and make them wards of the state. Blacks have always believed that they are primarily responsible for their own future. Yet during Reconstruction especially, they knew all too well that the persistence of antiblack prejudice and discrimination, as well as the enduring legacy of slavery, required federal action. Only the federal government could ensure their freedom and their rights in the face of widespread and hostile white opposition.

## The Defeat of Reconstruction

While northern whites thought that the Fifteenth Amendment completed Reconstruction, southern whites found black political involvement intolerable; they were shocked and outraged that their world had been turned upside down. For them,



black political participation represented a “base conspiracy against human nature.”<sup>32</sup> Even as many white southerners withdrew from the system, they immediately initiated a counterrevolution that would restore white rule and sought what they called “redemption” through the all-white Democratic Party.

White opposition movements proceeded differently in each state, but by the late 1860s, they had begun to succeed. As soon as they gained sufficient leverage, southern whites ousted blacks from political office in an effort to bring back what they called “home rule” under the reinvigorated ideology of states’ rights. Home rule and states’ rights served as euphemisms for white domination of land, black labor, and state and local government. Under the guise of restoring fiscal conservatism — trimming taxes and cutting state government functions and budgets — southern Democrats scaled back and ended programs that assisted freedpeople, including, for instance, ending South Carolina’s land reform commission.

An essential element of white “redemption” was the intimidation of blacks through terror, violence, and even murder. White supremacist and vigilante organizations formed throughout the South. While the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), organized in Tennessee in 1865, was the most notable group, others were the ’76 Association, the Knights of the White Camelia, the White Brotherhood, and the Pale Faces. Members of the KKK, called night riders because they conducted their raids at night, wore white robes and hoods to hide their identities. People from all sectors of southern white society joined these groups.

The targets of white attacks were often successful and economically independent black landowners, storeowners, and small entrepreneurs. Black schools, churches, homes, lodges, business buildings, livestock, barns, and fences were destroyed. Blacks were beaten, raped, murdered, and lynched. So widespread were these vicious attacks in the late 1860s and early 1870s that Congress held hearings to investigate the causes of this widespread lawlessness. “The object of it is to kill out the leading men of the republican party . . . men who have taken a prominent stand,” testified Emanuel Fortune, a delegate to Florida’s constitutional convention and member of the state house of representatives who had been forced from his home and county by the KKK. In other testimony, Congress learned that Jack Dupree of Monroe County, Mississippi, the strong-willed president of a local Republican club, had been lynched by the KKK in front of his wife and newborn twins.<sup>33</sup>

To restore order, Congress passed two **Force Acts**, in 1870 and 1871, to protect the civil rights of blacks as defined in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. Federal troops rather than state militias were authorized to put down the widespread lawlessness, and those who conspired to deprive black people of their civil rights were to be tried in federal rather than state or local courts.

Nevertheless, the violence continued. In Colfax, Louisiana, a disputed election in 1873 prompted whites to use cannon and rifle fire to disband a group of armed freedmen, commanded by black militia and veterans, who were attempting to maintain Republican control of the town. On Easter Sunday, in the bloodiest racial massacre

of the era, more than 280 blacks were killed, including 50 who had surrendered. The Colfax Massacre demonstrated the limits of armed black self-defense and the lengths to which whites would go to secure white dominance. A similar white attack occurred in 1876 in Hamburg, South Carolina, where skirmishes between black militia, armed by the state, and whites, acting on their own authority, escalated into a shoot-out. Six black men died at the hands of the white mob. The Hamburg Massacre routed local black political authority and strengthened white resolve to “redeem” South Carolina.

In the end, the Republican Party, the federal government, and northern whites all accepted the return of white ex-Confederates to political and economic power. With the death of Thaddeus Stevens in 1868 and Charles Sumner in 1874, blacks lost their most effective spokesmen in Congress. Growing numbers of Republicans had wearied of the party’s crusade on behalf of blacks and were happy to turn what they called the “Negro problem” over to southern whites, who were presumed to know best how to handle it. Republicans were confident that the Fifteenth Amendment had secured their black voting base in the South. As the party gathered strength in the Midwest and West, recruiting black Republicans — and securing a southern base for the Republican Party — became less important to the party. Instead, it turned its attention to economic issues, such as support for railroads and industry. Especially after the panic of 1873 set off a deep four-year depression, black Republicans in the South, and black civil rights in general, became expendable.

One indication of the federal government’s abandonment of the freedpeople was its failure to back the Freedman’s Savings and Trust Company, which collapsed during the depression. Chartered by Congress in 1865 to promote thrift and savings among freedpeople, it had many small savings accounts averaging less than \$50 each. Its last president was Frederick Douglass, who deposited \$10,000 of his own money to bolster the institution. When the bank failed in 1874, thousands of African Americans lost all they had. Eventually, half of the account holders received reimbursements of about 60 percent of their deposits. The other half received nothing.

By 1877, southern whites had retaken political control of all the southern states. That same year, in a political deal that resolved the disputed 1876 presidential election between the Democrat Samuel Tilden and the Republican Rutherford B. Hayes, Black Reconstruction officially ended. In return for a Hayes victory, Republicans agreed to remove federal troops from the South. In April 1877, when the troops withdrew, southern blacks were left without federal protection.

The U.S. Supreme Court further undermined black civil rights. In the 1873 **Slaughterhouse Cases**, the Court, distinguishing between national citizenship and state citizenship, ruled that the Fourteenth Amendment guaranteed only a narrow class of national citizenship rights and did not encompass the array of civil rights pertaining to state citizenship. A decade later, in the **Civil Rights Cases** (1883), the Court overturned the Civil Rights Act of 1875, declaring that Congress did not have the authority to protect against the discriminatory conduct of individuals and private groups. As a result, private companies and businesses, such as hotels, restaurants, and theaters,

could refuse to serve black people, and they did. The Court thus legitimized the power of states and private individuals and institutions to discriminate against black citizens and practically canceled the power of the federal government to intervene. AME bishop Henry McNeal Turner expressed pervasive black feelings of both outrage and despair. The decision, he proclaimed, “absolves the Negro’s allegiance to the general government, makes the American flag to him a rag of contempt instead of a symbol of liberty.”<sup>34</sup>

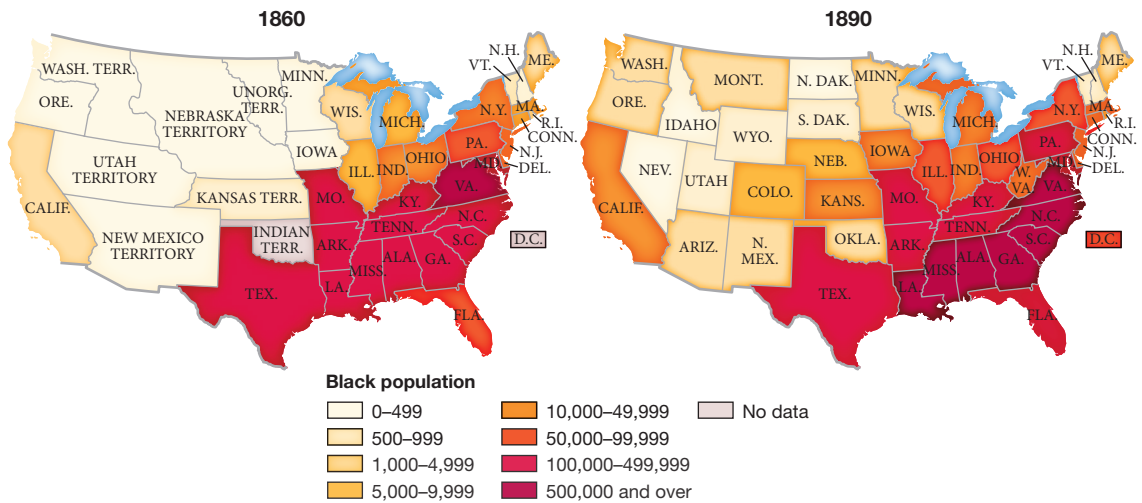
## Opportunities and Limits outside the South

During the Civil War, roughly 100,000 blacks left the South permanently, relocating in the North, Midwest, and West, especially in areas bordering on the former Confederacy (Map 9.2).<sup>35</sup> During Reconstruction, the migration continued, as many African Americans believed they had to leave the South to improve their lives. Wherever they went, however, they encountered well-established patterns of antiblack prejudice and discrimination. Often new patterns developed as well. White military officials, workers, factory owners, and union leaders limited black opportunities for dignified work and fair wages, further circumscribing black lives. By the end of the 1870s, national indifference to the plight of blacks meant that wherever they lived, they knew that they themselves, not the states or the federal government, had to advance their own cause and protect their rights and liberties.

### Autonomy in the West

For African Americans, as for all other Americans, the West beckoned as a land of opportunity. Some who envisioned a better future for themselves in the West were young men who joined the army. The U.S. Colored Troops were disbanded after the war, but new black units (again with white officers) were authorized. Between 1866 and 1917, 25,000 black men — some former Civil War soldiers and others with no prior military experience — served in the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry Regiments and the Twenty-Fourth and Twenty-Fifth Infantry Regiments (established in 1866), all assigned to military posts in the West. There they fought in the Indian wars that tragically dispossessed Native Americans of their land and removed them onto reservations. Native Americans called these black soldiers **buffalo soldiers**, apparently in reference to their fierce fighting abilities and their dark curly hair, which resembled a buffalo’s mane. Thirteen enlisted men and six officers received the Congressional Medal of Honor for their service in the Indian wars. Private Henry McCombs of the Tenth Cavalry bragged, “We made the West,” having “defeated the hostile tribes of Indians; and made the country safe to live in.”<sup>36</sup>

Buffalo soldiers led a rough life on remote military posts. Most were single, although over time, as camp life improved, some married or brought wives and children to join them. Unlike white soldiers, who rotated out of service in the West to



**MAP 9.2 African American Population Distribution, 1860 and 1890**

In the years following the Civil War, the black population grew significantly and began to spread across the nation. Nevertheless, the vast majority of blacks remained wedded to the South. The states that witnessed the largest and most striking growth in their black populations from 1860 onward, and those with the largest total numbers of blacks in 1890, were those of the former Confederacy—the so-called black belt states of the antebellum and postbellum South—and the states bordering them. ■ **Outside the states of the former Confederacy, which states and territories had the largest African American population increases in this period?**

posts in the South and East, buffalo soldiers remained in the West, where the army expected they would encounter less racial hostility. But tensions were evident between buffalo soldiers, on one hand, and whites, Native Americans, and Latinos on the other, particularly in Kansas and in Texas along the Mexican border. Sometimes these tensions erupted into violence, as when a black soldier was lynched in Sturgis, Dakota Territory, in 1885. In response, twenty men from the Twenty-Fifth Infantry shot up two saloons, killing one white civilian.

A few black men became officers, but not without enduring discrimination both within the ranks and from white officers. Henry O. Flipper is one example. Appointed to West Point by a Reconstruction Republican from Georgia, Flipper became the first black to graduate from the military academy in 1877. As a second lieutenant in the Tenth Cavalry Regiment, he was often assigned to manual labor instead of command positions. Nevertheless, he served with distinction in the Apache War of 1880. Two years later, however, he was dismissed from the army on a controversial charge of embezzlement. For the rest of his life, he fought to be exonerated and reinstated.

Other African Americans went west as families. An especially notable migration took place from Tennessee and Kentucky to Kansas, where African Americans

hoped to claim cheap public land available under the Homestead Act of 1862. In 1876, the Hartwell family of Pulaski, Tennessee (which had been the birthplace of the KKK in 1866), migrated to Kansas because Tennessee was “no place for colored people.”<sup>37</sup> In Kansas, black migrants built all-black towns that promised freedom from white persecution and an opportunity for self-government. Nicodemus, incorporated in 1877, was the most famous of these towns. “Nicodemus is the most harmonious place on earth,” proclaimed one of the town’s newspapers in 1887. “Everybody works for the interest of the town and all pull together.”<sup>38</sup> It grew out of a development proposal by W. J. Niles, a black businessman, and a white land developer named W. R. Hill. The first black settlers came from Lexington, Kentucky, and by 1880, the thriving town, which serviced a growing county, had almost 260 black and almost 60 white residents, a bank, general stores, hotels, a pharmacy, a millinery, a livery, and a barbershop.<sup>39</sup> One resident was Edward P. McCabe, a talented and ambitious New Yorker and an active Republican who, upon moving to Nicodemus, became a farmer, an attorney, and a land agent. During the years he served as state auditor (1883–1887), he was the highest-ranking black officeholder in the country.

Benjamin “Pap” Singleton, who detested sharecropping and promoted black landownership as the most viable basis for black self-improvement, became the most important proponent of the black migration to Kansas. Operating out of Edgefield, Tennessee, his Edgefield Real Estate and Homestead Association spread word of available land and a hospitable environment for blacks in Kansas. Black newspapers, mass meetings, circulars, and letters home from migrants also inspired “emigration fever.” Singleton became known as “the Moses of the Colored Exodus.” In the spring and summer of 1879, more than 6,000 blacks from Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi — called **Exodusters** — migrated to Kansas, where they were able to settle on land that became theirs. John Solomon Lewis of Louisiana described the feeling: “When I landed on the soil, I looked on the ground and I says this is free ground. Then I looked on the heavens, and I says them is free and beautiful heavens. Then I looked within my heart, and I says to myself I wonder why I never was free before?”<sup>40</sup>

Landownership made the difference, and the Exodusters established four all-black farming communities that grew into towns with businesses, churches, and schools. Most Exodusters decided for themselves to take a chance on the West, although grassroots leaders such as Singleton and Henry Adams from Shreveport, Louisiana, helped inspire them. Adams’s activities in politics and black labor organizing were indicative of a growing grassroots black nationalism. Involved in a variety of regional networks along the Mississippi River, Adams promoted migration to Kansas and also supported the Colonization Council, which sought federal funds for black migration to Liberia.

Between 1865 and 1920, more than sixty all-black towns were created in the West, some fifty of them in Oklahoma, where new settlements of southern freedmen joined with former slaves owned by Native Americans were established in what had been





### **Black Homesteaders**

Nicodemus, Kansas, founded in 1877, is among the oldest and most famous of the black towns founded in the late nineteenth century. In these settlements, black migrants such as the men and women shown here, left behind the racial restrictions and horrors of the South for the promise of a new start: a viable homestead in the West. While some whites lived in Nicodemus, the town's population was mostly black. Nicodemus peaked in the early 1880s before beginning to decline late in the decade. A few hundred people still live there today. This late-nineteenth-century photo of two well-dressed black couples in Nicodemus reflects a striking sense of frontier commitment and rough-hewn refinement. These couples vividly illustrate the sense of hope and possibility projected by the boosters of Nicodemus at its height. *Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C., HABS KANS, 33-Nico, 1-6, 069503p/.*

designated Indian Territory. Tullahassee, for example, which began as a Creek settlement in 1850, had become mostly African American by 1881, as the Creeks moved elsewhere. In the late 1880s, when Indian land in Oklahoma was opened up for settlement, all-black towns boomed. They offered a freedom unknown elsewhere. But the five- to ten-acre plots on which most black migrants settled were too small for



independent farms, and many ended up working for nearby ranches and larger farms owned by whites.<sup>41</sup> Eventually, most of the black boomtowns died out.

### The Right to Work for Fair Wages

Like Jourdon Anderson, some other former slaves left the South as soon as they were free, moving north and west in expectation of fair wages for their labor and a good education for their children. Many gravitated to cities, where the hope of better jobs soon faltered. Black newcomers ran into the prejudice and discrimination in hiring and wages that had long hobbled black workers there. Managers were reluctant to hire them, and white workers, who saw them as competition, were hostile, especially since blacks were often hired as strikebreakers. White labor unions characteristically excluded blacks.

Some individuals were able to set out on their own. In 1865, when white caulkers in the Baltimore shipyards went on strike to force the firing of more than a hundred black caulkers and longshoremen, Isaac Myers, a highly skilled black caulker, joined with other black labor activists and a small group of supportive whites to create the black-owned and cooperatively run Chesapeake Marine Railway and Dry Dock Company. It was a strong center of black union activism, and in 1869, Myers helped found the Colored National Labor Union to advance the cause of black workers. Myers was also a proponent of interracial labor solidarity. Yet his efforts were short-lived. By the mid-1870s, the Colored National Labor Union had dissolved due to internal dissension and the economic depression that followed the panic of 1873. By the mid-1880s, the company Myers had founded also had collapsed.

The idea of interracial labor solidarity was taken up by the Knights of Labor, a broad-based union founded in 1869 that welcomed both skilled and unskilled workers and eventually African Americans and women. With the rise of industry in the North during and after the war, the Knights believed that only a united and inclusive labor movement could stand up to the growing power of industrialists, who, said the Knights, built profits through “wage slavery.” The organization’s motto was “An injury to one is the concern of all.” At its height in 1886, the Knights had more than 700,000 members. Despite the fact that its assemblies in the South were segregated by race, the Knights’ commitment to interracial unionism drew African American support. Black workers fully embraced the Knights’ major goals: the eight-hour workday, the abolition of child and convict labor, equal pay for equal work, and worker-owned and worker-managed cooperatives. By 1886, two-thirds of Richmond, Virginia’s 5,000 tobacco workers — many of them black — belonged to the organization. But the Knights of Labor’s quick decline followed its quick rise to prominence. Failed strikes and disputes between skilled and unskilled workers weakened it internally, and the 1886 Haymarket bombing — a deadly confrontation between striking workers and police in Chicago — damaged its reputation. As southern whites increasingly withdrew from the Knights, it became a largely black organization that fell victim to racial terrorism. In Richmond, as elsewhere, the demise of the Knights doomed prospects for interracial unionism for decades.

## The Struggle for Equal Rights

In the North and West, the fight for dignified work and equal labor rights took place in concert with a growing civil rights struggle that was part of a larger black freedom struggle that had begun before the war. The National Equal Rights League continued to promote full legal and political equality, land acquisition as a basis for economic independence, education, frugality, and moral rectitude. Local, state, and national conventions kept the tradition of vigorous agitation alive, while petition campaigns and lobbying kept the pressure on local and state governments and the Republican Party to pass legislation and amendments guaranteeing black civil rights and suffrage.

On the local level, black campaigns against segregated seating in public conveyances continued, many of them having been initiated by women. In Philadelphia, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and Harriet Tubman were among those who protested their forcible ejections from streetcars. The long campaign led by Octavius Catto, a teacher at the Institute for Colored Youth, and William Still, the best-known “agent” on the underground railroad, finally succeeded in getting a desegregation law passed in 1867. Three days later, when a conductor told school principal Caroline Le Count that she could not board a streetcar, she lodged a complaint, and the conductor was fined. Thereafter, Philadelphia’s streetcar companies abided by the new law, reversing decades of custom.<sup>42</sup> A similar protest in which Sojourner Truth played a role had ended streetcar segregation in Washington, D.C., in 1865.

Segregated schools were the norm in the North, and as in the South, many blacks preferred all-black schools with black teachers who took to heart the interests of black students. Catto argued for this position. He also pointed out that white teachers assigned to black schools were likely to be those not qualified for positions in white schools and, thus, “inferior.”<sup>43</sup> In other communities, black fathers initiated suits so that their children could attend white schools. Cases in Iowa in 1875 and 1876 brought court rulings in the plaintiffs’ favor, but local whites blocked their enforcement. In Indiana, despite an 1869 law permitting localities to provide schools for black children, communities with few black residents did not do so, and black children all too often went without an education. The same situation pertained in Illinois and California.<sup>44</sup>

During Black Reconstruction, educational opportunities for black children may have been more plentiful in the South than in the North, and opportunities for black voting were better in the South, too. In 1865, black men in the North could vote without restriction only in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. Together these states accounted for just 7 percent of the northern black population. Some northern states actually took action to deny black men the vote — Minnesota, Kansas, and Ohio in 1867, and Michigan and New York in 1868. Most northern whites viewed the vote as a white male prerogative. Even where blacks could vote, they were often intimidated and subjected to violence. In 1871, Octavius Catto was murdered on his way to the polls.

Thus, in 1869 and 1870, ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment proved to be as contentious in the North and West as it was in the South. The former slave states Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, and Tennessee rejected the amendment, but so did California and New Jersey; New York rescinded its ratification; and Ohio waffled, first rejecting and then ratifying the amendment. Reasons for the opposition varied. Californians, for example, wanted to ensure that the amendment did not enfranchise Chinese residents. The debate in states that eventually ratified the amendment varied. Massachusetts and Connecticut had literacy requirements that they hoped would remain unaffected. Rhode Island wanted to retain its requirement that foreign-born citizens had to own property worth at least \$134 to be eligible to vote. These restrictions narrowed the electorate in the North and West by making it difficult for poor and illiterate whites, as well as blacks, to vote. After the end of Reconstruction, some of the same and similar techniques would be used by southern states to disfranchise blacks.

The Fifteenth Amendment proved most contentious among many northern women for what it did *not* do: it did not extend the vote to women. Many woman suffrage supporters, especially white women, felt betrayed that black men would get the vote before women. Abolitionists and feminists had long been allied in the struggle for equal rights, and women had actively worked for abolition, emancipation, and the Thirteenth Amendment. In 1866, to present a united front in support of universal suffrage, women's rights leaders Lucy Stone, Susan B. Anthony, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton joined with Frederick Douglass to found the American Equal Rights Association. But it soon became apparent that members of this organization did not all share the same priorities. (See Document Project: The Vote, pp. 356–65.) Douglass and Stone believed that the organization should work to secure the black male vote first and then seek woman suffrage. Stanton and Anthony detested the idea that the rights of women would take a backseat to those of black men. Stanton even resorted to using the racist epithet “Sambo” in reference to black men.<sup>45</sup> Black feminists such as Sojourner Truth and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper took Stanton to task for ignoring the reality of black women's lives. “You white women speak here of rights,” Harper protested. “I speak of wrongs.”<sup>46</sup>

Dissension over the Fifteenth Amendment divided old allies, destroyed friendships, and split the American Equal Rights Association (AERA) — and ultimately the women's movement itself. In 1869, in the wake of the AERA's fracturing, Anthony and Stanton organized the National Woman Suffrage Association, which focused on securing voting rights for women at the national level. That same year, Stone organized the rival American Woman Suffrage Association, which included among its members Harper, Truth, and Douglass and developed a state-by-state approach to woman suffrage. The bitter fight over the Fifteenth Amendment revealed deeper divisions in American politics and society over the rights and status of African Americans that would undercut their opportunities for decades to come.

## CONCLUSION

### Revolutions and Reversals

The end of slavery in the United States was revolutionary. For former slaves, now free, lives and livelihoods had to be remade. Foremost on the minds of many was reuniting with family members separated by slave sales and war. New black communities were built and old ones were renewed, centering on independent black churches, schools, and enterprises. Freedpeople knew that to live independently, they had to be literate, and they placed great faith in education. They learned eagerly, and within a decade, dozens of black colleges were giving students a formal and expanded education, including the opportunity to acquire job skills, such as teacher training. Former slaves remade themselves, their families, and their communities, but their hopes for economic independence faded as the reality of emancipation, which had made them free but had not provided them with land, set in. Impoverished and pressed into labor patterns that resembled slavery, most became tenant farmers or sharecroppers, dependent on white landowners, and many became trapped in a cycle of debt.

When the Radical Republicans in Congress took control of Reconstruction in 1867, their efforts to guarantee civil rights for former slaves effected a political revolution in the South that had the potential for an economic and social revolution, too. With black votes and officeholding, southern states wrote new constitutions that created state aid for economic development, progressive tax and judicial systems, much-needed social welfare institutions, and the region's first public school systems. But this so-called Black Reconstruction proved short-lived. Southern white opposition was unrelenting and often violent. By 1877, whites had regained control of state and local governments in the South. As the Republican Party, now weary of the campaign for black rights, increasingly turned its attention to economic development, southern blacks in particular were left with shockingly little protection and dwindling numbers of effective white advocates of equal rights for blacks. "When you turned us loose," Frederick Douglass chastised the Republican National Convention in 1876, "you gave us no acres: you turned us loose to the sky, to the storm, to the whirlwind, and, worst of all, you turned us loose to the wrath of our infuriated masters."<sup>47</sup>

Some southern blacks went west to build new communities or to serve in army units that fought the Indian wars. Others sought work in the expanding factories of the North. But wherever they went, they encountered prejudice and discrimination. Although campaigns for desegregating transportation and schools resulted in the passage of civil rights laws, those laws often went unenforced. U.S. Supreme Court rulings limited the impact of well-intentioned laws and constitutional amendments passed during Black Reconstruction. In 1883, a revived National Equal Rights League, meeting in Louisville, Kentucky, conceded "that many of the laws intended to secure us our rights as citizens are nothing more than dead letters."<sup>48</sup>



Abandoned by the government as they sought to carve out meaningful lives within an increasingly white supremacist nation, African Americans understood more clearly now than ever before what they had always known in their hearts: they were responsible for their own uplift. Thus freedom's first generations turned inward, practiced self-reliance, and focused even more intently on self-elevation and the building of strong communities that would sustain them going forward.

## CHAPTER 9 REVIEW

### KEY TERMS

**Thirteenth Amendment (ratified 1865)** p. 324

**historically black colleges and universities** p. 329

**Special Field Order 15** p. 330

**Freedman's Bureau** p. 330

**sharecropping** p. 331

**crop lien** p. 331

**convict lease** p. 331

**black codes** p. 331

**Black Reconstruction** p. 336

**Civil Rights Act of 1866** p. 337

**Fourteenth Amendment (ratified 1868)** p. 337

**Reconstruction Act of 1867 (first)** p. 339

**Union League** p. 342

**Fifteenth Amendment (ratified 1870)** p. 343

**Civil Rights Act of 1875** p. 343

**Force Acts (1870, 1871)** p. 344

**Slaughterhouse Cases (1873)** p. 345

**Civil Rights Cases (1883)** p. 345

**buffalo soldiers** p. 346

**Exodusters** p. 348

### REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What practices, institutions, and organizations did former slaves develop to facilitate their transition to freedom? How successful were the freedpeople, and what challenges did they face?
2. What factors resulted in the defeat of Reconstruction? Was it inevitable, or might things have turned out differently had any of these circumstances been different? Explain.
3. What kinds of opportunities did former slaves seek in the North and West? How did they attempt to realize their dreams? What obstacles did they have to overcome?
4. Should we judge Reconstruction on its initial promise or its ultimate failure? What is your assessment of this period?

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## The Vote

After the Thirteenth Amendment ended slavery in 1865, the Fourteenth Amendment, proposed in June 1866, sought to secure black civil rights by defining citizenship and guaranteeing the equal protection of the laws. In establishing the means by which representation in Congress would be apportioned, this amendment used the word *male* for the first time in the Constitution. Supporters of woman suffrage were dismayed, for they had hoped for universal suffrage — the right of every adult to vote without regard to race or sex. In August 1866, a group of women had joined with Frederick Douglass to found the American Equal Rights Association (AERA) in an effort to create a united front for advancing the causes of black and women's rights. When it became evident that the Fifteenth Amendment, proposed in February 1869, would secure black male suffrage but not woman suffrage, the AERA split.

Some AERA members, led by Douglass, believed that black male suffrage was the most immediate need. Others, including Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, gave priority to woman suffrage. But what did black women think? Did they ally themselves with black men or white women? In the following documents, black women voice their opinions on suffrage, an issue that went to the core of their identities; and, we read how the recognition of black manhood figured into popular arguments for the black male vote.

Contemporary visual representations of Black Reconstruction, notably those depicting black male voters and politicians, reveal the historical moment and the political, racial, and cultural as well as the aesthetic aims of the artists. In the late 1860s, the Radical Republicans were still in their ascendancy, but by 1874, their heyday was over. Within the party and throughout the nation, support for freedpeople and their cause had diminished.

### Sojourner Truth | *Equal Voting Rights, 1867*

**SOJOURNER TRUTH (1797–1883) was nearly seventy years old when she spoke at the second meeting of the American Equal Rights Association in New York City in May 1867. She had begun life as a slave in New York and become one of the most famous African Americans of the nineteenth century. An abolitionist and a supporter of women's rights, Truth electrified audiences with her insight and candor.**

I feel that if I have to answer for the deeds done in my body just as much as a man, I have a right to have just as much as a man. There is a great

stir about colored men getting their rights, but not a word about the colored women; and if colored men get their rights, and not colored women theirs, you see the colored men will be masters over the women, and it will be just as bad as it was before. So I am for keeping the thing going while things are stirring; because if we wait till it is still, it will take a great while to get it going again. White women are a great deal smarter, and know more than colored women, while colored women do not know scarcely anything. They go out washing, which is about as high as a colored woman gets, and their men go about idle, strutting up and down; and when the women come home, they ask for their money

and take it all, and then scold because there is no food. I want you to consider on that, chil'n. I call you chil'n; you are somebody's chil'n, and I am old enough to be mother of all that is here. I want women to have their rights. In the courts women have no right, no voice; nobody speaks for them. I wish woman to have her voice there among the pettifoggers.<sup>o</sup> If it is not a fit place for women, it is unfit for men to be there.

I am above eighty years old;<sup>o</sup> it is about time for me to be going. I have been forty years a slave and forty years free, and would be here forty years more to have equal rights for all. I suppose I am kept here because something remains for me to do; I suppose I am yet to help to break the chain. I have done a great deal of work; as much as a man, but did not get so much pay. I used to work in the field and bind grain, keeping up with the cradler;<sup>o</sup> but men doing no more, got twice as much pay; so with the German women. They work in the field and do as much work, but do not get the pay. We do as much, we eat as much, we want as much. I suppose I am

about the only colored woman that goes about to speak for the rights of the colored women. I want to keep the thing stirring, now that the ice is cracked. What we want is a little money. You men know that you get as much again as women when you write, or for what you do. When we get our rights we shall not have to come to you for money, for then we shall have money enough in our own pockets; and may be you will ask us for money. But help us now until we get it. It is a good consolation to know that when we have got this battle once fought we shall not be coming to you any more. You have been having our rights so long, that you think, like a slave-holder, that you own us. I know that it is hard for one who has held the reins for so long to give up; it cuts like a knife. It will feel all the better when it closes up again. I have been in Washington about three years, seeing about these colored people. Now colored men have [will soon attain] the right to vote. There ought to be equal rights now more than ever, since colored people have got their freedom.

<sup>o</sup> Tricksters.

<sup>o</sup> She was actually about seventy.

<sup>o</sup> A machine for binding and bunching grain.

SOURCE: Philip S. Foner and Robert James Branham, eds., *Lift Every Voice: African American Oratory, 1787–1900* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 464–65.

## Proceedings of the American Equal Rights Association

## A Debate: Negro Male Suffrage vs. Woman Suffrage, 1869

The May 12, 1869, meeting of the AMERICAN EQUAL RIGHTS ASSOCIATION was its last. By this time, tensions between those who prioritized black male suffrage and those who prioritized woman suffrage had torn the association apart. In this excerpt from the meeting's proceedings, we hear from Frederick Douglass and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, two of the most important

African American leaders of the day and key advocates for abolition, African American rights, and women's rights. Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone, Pauline W. Davis, Julia Ward Howe, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were key white advocates for both abolition and women's rights and, to differing extents, supporters of African American rights.



MR. DOUGLASS: I come here more as a listener than to speak and I have listened with a great deal of pleasure. . . . There is no name greater than that of Elizabeth Cady Stanton in the matter of woman's rights and equal rights, but my sentiments are tinged a little against [her remarks in] *The Revolution* [a magazine]. There was in the address to which I allude the employment of certain names, such as "Sambo," and the gardener, and the bootblack, and the daughters of Jefferson and Washington and other daughters. (Laughter.) I must say that I asked what difference there is between the daughters of Jefferson and Washington and other daughters. (Laughter.) I must say that I do not see how any one can pretend that there is the same urgency in giving the ballot to woman as to the negro. With us, the matter is a question of life and death, at least, in fifteen States of the Union. When women, because they are women, are hunted down through the cities of New York and New Orleans; when they are dragged from their houses and hung upon lamp-posts; when their children are torn from their arms, and their brains dashed out upon the pavement; when they are objects of insult and outrage at every turn; when they are in danger of having their homes burnt down over their heads; when their children are not allowed to enter schools; then they will have an urgency to obtain the ballot equal to our own. (Great applause.)

A VOICE: — Is that not all true about black women?

MR. DOUGLASS: — Yes, yes, yes; it is true of the black woman, but not because she is a woman, but because she is black. (Applause.) Julia Ward Howe at the conclusion of her great speech delivered at the convention in Boston last year said: "I am willing that the negro shall get the ballot before me." (Applause.) Woman! why, she has 10,000 modes of grappling with her difficulties. I believe that all the virtue of the world can take care of all the evil. I believe that all the intelligence can take care of all the ignorance.

(Applause.) I am in favor of woman's suffrage in order that we shall have all the virtue and vice confronted. Let me tell you that when there were few houses in which the black man could have put his head, this wooly head of mine found a refuge in the house of Mrs. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and if I had been blacker than sixteen midnights, without a single star, it would have been the same. (Applause.)

MISS [Susan B.] ANTHONY: — The old anti-slavery school says women must stand back and wait until the negroes shall be recognized. But we say, if you will not give the whole loaf of suffrage to the entire people, give it to the most intelligent first. (Applause.) If intelligence, justice, and morality are to have precedence in the Government, let the question of woman be brought up first and that of the negro last. (Applause.) While I was canvassing the State with petitions and had them filled with names for our cause to the Legislature, a man dared to say to me that the freedom of women was all a theory and not a practical thing. (Applause.) When Mr. Douglass mentioned the black man first and the woman last, if he had noticed he would have seen that it was the men that clapped and not the women. There is not the woman born who desires to eat the bread of dependence, no matter whether it be from the hand of father, husband, or brother; for any one who does so eat her bread places herself in the power of the person from whom she takes it. (Applause.) Mr. Douglass talks about the wrongs of the negro; but with all the outrages that he to-day suffers, he would not exchange his sex and take the place of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. (Laughter and applause.)

MR. DOUGLASS: I want to know if granting you the right of suffrage will change the nature of our sexes? (Great laughter.)

MISS ANTHONY: It will change the pecuniary position of woman; it will place her where she can earn her own bread. (Loud applause.) She will not then be driven to such employments only as man chooses for her. . . .

MRS. LUCY STONE: — Mrs. Stanton will, of course, advocate the precedence for her sex, and Mr. Douglass will strive for the first position for his, and both are perhaps right. If it be true that the government derives its authority from the consent of the governed, we are safe in trusting that principle to the uttermost. If one has a right to say that you can not read and therefore can not vote, then it may be said that you are a woman and therefore can not vote. We are lost if we turn away from the middle principle and argue for one class. . . . The gentleman who addressed you claimed that the negroes had the first right to the suffrage, and drew a picture which only his great word-power can do. He again in Massachusetts, when it had cast a majority in favor of Grant and negro suffrage, stood upon the platform and said that woman had better wait for the negro; that is, that both could not be carried, and that the negro had better be the one. But I freely forgave him because he felt as he spoke. But woman suffrage is more imperative than his own; and I want to remind the audience that when he says what the Ku-Kluxes did all over the South, the Ku-Kluxes here in the North in the shape of men, take away the children from the mother, and separate them as completely as if done on the block of the auctioneer. . . . Woman has an ocean of wrongs too deep for any plummet, and the negro, too, has an ocean of wrongs that can not be fathomed. There are two great oceans; in the one is the black man, and in the other is the woman. But I thank God for that XV. Amendment, and hope it will be adopted in every State. I will be thankful in my soul if any body can get out of the terrible pit. But I believe that the safety of the government would be more promoted by the admission of woman as an element of restoration and harmony than the negro. I believe that the influence of woman will save the country before every other power. (Applause.) I see the signs of times pointing to this consummation, and I believe that in some parts of the country women will vote for the President of the United States in 1872. . . .

MRS. PAULINE W. DAVIS said she would not be altogether satisfied to have the XVth

Amendment passed without the XVIth, for woman would have a race of tyrants raised above her in the South, and the black women of that country would also receive worse treatment than if the Amendment was not passed. Take any class that have been slaves, and you will find that they are the worst when free, and become the hardest masters. The colored women of the South say they do not want to get married to the negro, as their husbands can take their children away from them, and also appropriate their earnings. The black women are more intelligent than the men, because they have learned something from their mistresses. She then related incidents showing how black men whip and abuse their wives in the South. One of her sister's servants whipped his wife every Sunday regularly. (Laughter.) She thought that sort of men should not have the making of the laws for the government of the women throughout the land. (Applause.)

MR. DOUGLASS said that all disinterested spectators would concede that this Equal Rights meeting had been pre-eminently a Woman's Rights meeting. (Applause.) They had just heard an argument with which he could not agree — that the suffrage to the black men should be postponed to that of the women. . . . "I do not believe the story that the slaves who are enfranchised become the worst of tyrants. (A voice, 'Neither do I.' Applause.) I know how this theory came about. When a slave was made a driver, he made himself more officious than the white driver, so that his master might not suspect that he was favoring those under him. But we do not intend to have any master over us. (Applause.)"

THE PRESIDENT (MRS. STANTON) argued that not another man should be enfranchised until enough women are admitted to the polls to outweigh those already there. (Applause.) She did not believe in allowing ignorant negroes and foreigners to make laws for her to obey. (Applause.)

MRS. [Frances Ellen Watkins] HARPER (colored) said that when it was a question of race, she let the lesser question of sex go. But the

white women all go for sex, letting race occupy a minor position. She liked the idea of work-women, but she would like to know if it was broad enough to take colored women.

MISS ANTHONY and several others: Yes, yes.

MRS. HARPER said that when she was at Boston there were sixty women who left work because one colored woman went to gain a

livelihood in their midst. (Applause.) If the nation could only handle one question, she would not have the black woman put a single straw in the way, if only the men of the race could obtain what they wanted. (Great applause.)

SOURCE: Philip S. Foner, ed., *Frederick Douglass on Women's Rights* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), 86–89.

## Mary Ann Shadd Cary | Woman's Right to Vote, Early 1870s

MARY ANN SHADD CARY (1823–1893) was an educator, a journalist, and a reformer who was deeply committed to both black and women's rights. In the 1850s, she was also a proponent of emigration to Canada. Following the split of the AERA, she sided with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony in founding the National Woman Suffrage Association. At the time she gave this speech, Cary was teaching in Washington, D.C. The speech captures the substance of remarks she made before the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives in support of a petition on behalf of enfranchising women in Washington, D.C. In 1883, Cary received a law degree from Howard University.

By the provisions of the 14th & 15th amendments to the Constitution of the United States, — a logical sequence of which is the representation by colored men of time-honored commonwealths in both houses of Congress, — millions of colored women, to-day, share with colored men the responsibilities of freedom from chattel slavery. From the introduction of freedom<sup>o</sup> African slavery to its extinction, a period of more than

two hundred years, they shared equally with fathers, brothers, denied the right to vote. This fact of their investiture with the privileges of free women of the same time and by the same amendments which disentrained their kinsmen and conferred upon the latter the right of franchise, without so endowing themselves is one of the anomalies of a measure of legislation otherwise grand in conception and consequences beyond comparison. The colored women of this country though heretofore silent, in great measure upon this question of the right to vote by the women of the [copy missing], so long and ardently the cry of the noblest of the land, have neither been indifferent to their own just claims under the amendments, in common with colored men, nor to the demand for political recognition so justly made every where ~~within its borders~~ throughout the land.

The strength and glory of a free nation, is *not so much* in the size and equipments of its armies, as in the *loyal hearts* and willing hands of its *men and women*; And this fact has been illustrated in an eminent degree by well-known events in the history of the United States. To the ~~white~~ women of the nation conjointly with the men, it is indebted for arduous and dangerous personal service, and generous expenditure of time,

<sup>o</sup> The strikethroughs throughout are part of the original document.

wealth and counsel, so indispensable to success in its hour of danger. The colored *women* though humble in sphere, and unendowed with worldly goods, yet, led as by inspiration, — not only fed, and sheltered, and guided in *safety* the prisoner soldiers of the Union when escaping from the enemy, or the soldier who was compelled to risk life *itself* in the struggle to break the back-bone of rebellion, but gave their *sons* and brothers to the armies of the nation and their prayers to high Heaven for the success of the Right.

The surges of fratricidal war have passed we hope never to return; the premonitions of the future, are peace and good will; these blessings, so greatly to be desired, can only be made permanent, in responsible governments, — based as you affirm upon the consent of the governed, — by giving to both sexes practically the equal powers conferred in the provisions of the Constitution as amended. In the District of Columbia ~~over which Congress has exclusive~~

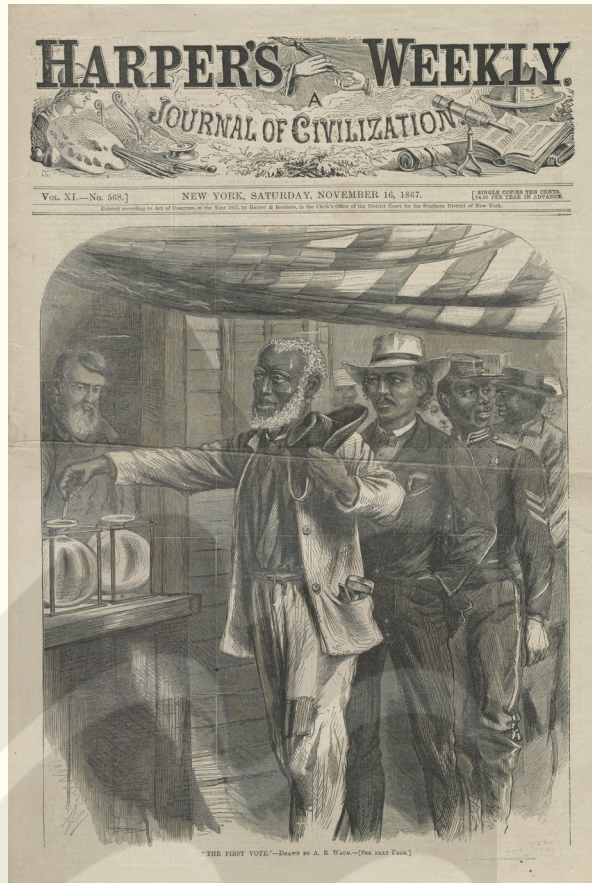
~~jurisdiction~~ the women in common with the women of the states and territories, feel keenly the discrimination against them in the retention of the word *male* in the organic act for the same, and as by reason of its retention, all the evils incident to partial legislation are endured by them, they sincerely, hope that the word *male* may be stricken out by Congress on your recommendation without delay. Taxed, and governed in other respects, without their consent, they respectfully demand, that the principles of the *founders* of the government may *not* be disregarded in their case: but, as there are *laws* by which they are tried, with penalties attached thereto, that they may be invested with the right to vote as do men, that thus as in all Republics *indeed*, they may in future, be governed by their own consent.

SOURCE: Philip S. Foner and Robert James Branham, eds., *Lift Every Voice: African American Oratory, 1787–1900* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 516–17.

## A. R. Waud | *The First Vote, 1867*

This image by A. R. WAUD (1828-1891), which appeared in *Harper's Weekly*, evokes the revolutionary importance of African Americans' first opportunity to vote. The range of facial expressions, dress, status, and life experiences represented in the line of black male voters suggests the various meanings and expectations attached to the event. The black voters are humanized and individualized — a poor laborer, a well-dressed city man, a soldier. This all-male image captures the reality of the vote as a privilege of manhood. The flag overhead, as well as the serious expression of the white man overseeing the voting, reflects the profound political transformation represented by this very special moment.





Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C., LC-DIG-ppmsca-31598.

## A. Clark | Address of the Colored State Convention to the People of Iowa in Behalf of Their Enfranchisement, 1868

Throughout the nineteenth century, African Americans met in local, state, regional, and national conventions to discuss their ongoing freedom struggle and develop a united front in terms of liberation and uplift goals, strategies, and tactics. These conventions modeled self-definition and self-reliance. These critical meetings also both helped unite African Americans as a people and present to their white compatriots, notably

their allies and friends, a clear and focused understanding of how they could best help advance the concerns of African Americans. This 1868 Iowa convention address makes an argument on behalf of black male enfranchisement. It was prepared and delivered to the convention by A. CLARK, chairman of the Committee on Address. What are the key elements of that argument? Are that argument and its rationale persuasive?

To the People of Iowa: . . . We ask no privilege; we simply ask you to recognize our claim to manhood by giving to us that right without which we have no power to defend ourselves from unjust legislation, and no voice in the government we have endeavored to preserve. Being men, we claim to be of that number comprehended in the Declaration of Independence, and who are entitled not only to life, but to equal rights in the pursuit and securing of happiness and in the choice of those who are to rule over us. Deprived of this, we are forced to pay taxes without representation; to submit, without appeal, to laws however offensive, without a single voice in framing them; to bear arms without the right to say whether against friend or foe — against loyalty or disloyalty. Without suffrage, we are forced into strict subjection to a government whose councils are to us foreign, and are called by our own countrymen to witness a violence upon the primary principles of a republican government as gross and outrageous as that which justly stirred patriot Americans to throw overboard the tea from English bottoms in a Boston harbor and to wage war for Independence. Let a consistent support be given to this principle of government, founded only “on the consent of the governed” — to this keystone in the arch of American liberty — and our full rights as freemen are secured. Our demands are not excessive; we ask not for social equality with the white man, as is often claimed by the shallow demagogue; for a law higher than human must forever govern social relations. We ask only that privilege which is now given to every white, native-born or adopted, male citizen of our State — the privilege of the ballot-box. We ask that the word “white” be stricken from the Constitution of our State; that the organic law of our State shall give to suffrage irrevocable guarantees that shall know of no distinction at the polls on account of color. . . . We demand this as native born citizens of the United States, and who have never known other allegiance than to its authority and the laws of our State,

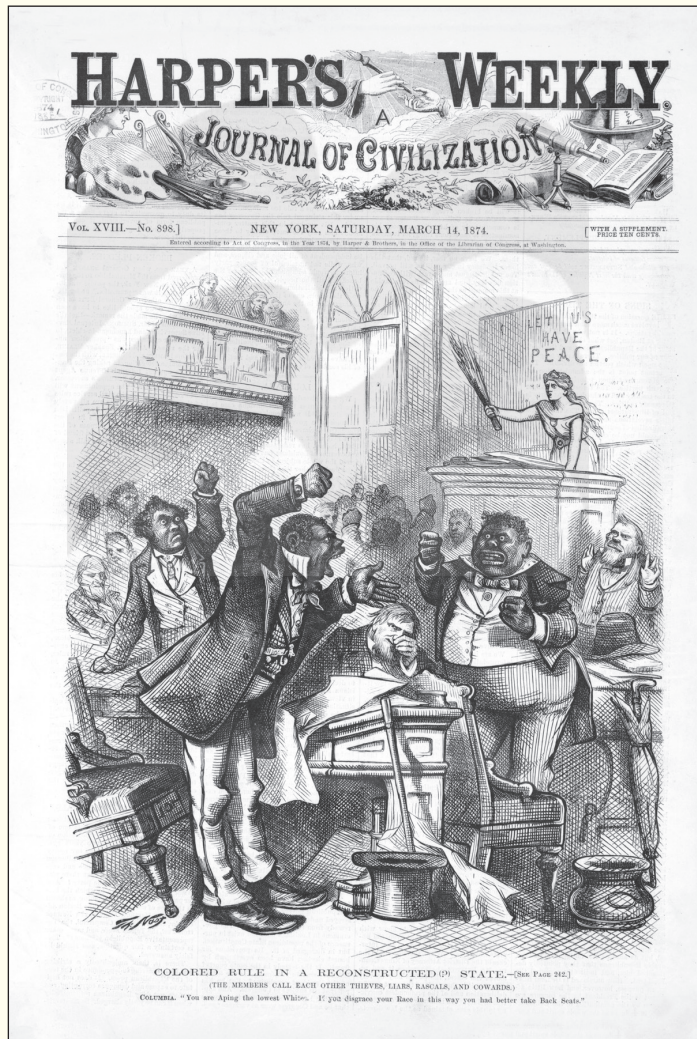
and as those who have been true and loyal to our government from its foundation to the present time, and who have never deserted its interest whilst even in the midst of treason and under subjection to its most violent enemies. We ask, in the honored name of 200,000 colored troops, five hundred of whom were from our own Iowa, who, with the first opportunity, enlisted under the flag of our country and the banner of our State, and bared their breasts to the remorseless storm of treason, and by hundreds went down to death in the conflict, whilst the franchised rebels and their cowardly friends, the now bitter enemies of our right to suffrage, remained in quiet at home, safe, and fattened on the fruits of our sacrifice, toil and blood. We make these demands as one of right and necessity, if not expediency, and are unwilling to believe that a powerful, ruling people, strengthened by new victories with the aid of our hands, could be less magnanimous in purpose and in action, less consistent with the true theory of a sound democracy, than to concede to us our claims. We believe that with expediency even our demands are not at war, but that with right does public policy strike hands and unite our votes, as it did our muskets, to the maintenance of authority over the disorganizing elements which attend a returning peace. We have too much faith in the permanency of this government to believe that the extension of the elective franchise to a few loyal colored men could unsettle its foundation or violate a single declaration of its rights. . . . In this can the colored men of Iowa take courage, and say to our white friends, we are Americans by birth and we assure you that we are Americans in feeling; and in spite of all the wrongs which we have long and silently endured in this our native country, we would yet exclaim, with a full heart, “O, America! with all thy faults, we love thee still.”

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SOURCE: Proceedings of the Iowa State Colored Convention, held in the City of Des Moines, February 12th and 13th, 1868 (Muscatine, IA, 1868).

## Thomas Nast | *Colored Rule in a Reconstructed(?) State*, 1874

*Colored Rule in a Reconstructed(?) State* by THOMAS NAST (1840–1902) appeared on the cover of the March 14, 1874, issue of *Harper's Weekly*. This drawing argues that Black Reconstruction was a tragic mistake owing to black inferiority and incapacity. The caption reads "The members call each other thieves, liars, rascals, and cowards." Columbia, the goddess at the podium under the banner that says "Let us have peace," is reprimanding the legislators: "You are Aping the lowest Whites. If you disgrace your Race in this way you had better take Back Seats." Compare this view of black South Carolina legislators with the images of dignified black men and women in this chapter. Which image or images make the most powerful impression? Why?



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C., LC-USZ62-102256.

**QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS**

1. What economic arguments do Sojourner Truth and Susan B. Anthony present on behalf of women's rights?
2. What are the political arguments of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Mary Ann Shadd Cary? How does Frederick Douglass counter such arguments? Does he take them seriously, or does he demean them?
3. Is Frances Ellen Watkins Harper a pragmatist? Why do you think she took the position she did?
4. Why, how, and with what consequences did supporters and opponents of the Fifteenth Amendment within the American Equal Rights Association make their case?
5. How do the images presented here reject and reinforce racial stereotypes? Evaluate how the visual documents compare to the reality of black participation in politics in the Reconstruction-era South. Give specific examples.

