

Post-Civil War Reconstruction: A New National Era

Emanuel Fortune Testifies Before Congress

"They always spoke very bitterly against it," said Florida Republican Emanuel Fortune, describing his white neighbors' reaction to the idea of black people voting. Those neighbors told Fortune, "The damned Republican party has put niggers to rule us, and we will not suffer it." Fortune was testifying before a congressional committee assigned to investigate Ku Klux Klan threats and violence against black southerners. After the Civil War, when anger in many southern white communities erupted in violence, some white southerners targeted black men like Fortune who organized voters or ran for office. "I got information that I would be missing some day and no one would know where I was, on account of my being a leading man in politics," Fortune recalled.

Emanuel Fortune's story typified the experience of black political leaders who emerged in the postwar period. Relatively young—Fortune was thirty-nine in 1871—these leaders were new to politics. Just a few years earlier, they had been outsiders—many of them slaves. Now they had a political voice. Fortune, for example, had participated in the 1868 constitutional convention that qualified Florida—which had been part of the Confederacy during the war—to reenter the Union by guaranteeing black suffrage and ratifying the Fourteenth Amendment. That amendment defined citizens as anyone born in the United States and guaranteed them the right to vote, to use the courts, to own property, and to be protected by all the citizens' rights outlined in the Constitution. The fact that a black man could run for office and get elected by a black constituency demonstrated those new rights. But the threats Fortune received also highlighted the risks run by southern black men who dared to claim seats at the political table. He described Jackson County, Florida, in 1869 as being in "such a state of lawlessness that my life was in danger at all times."

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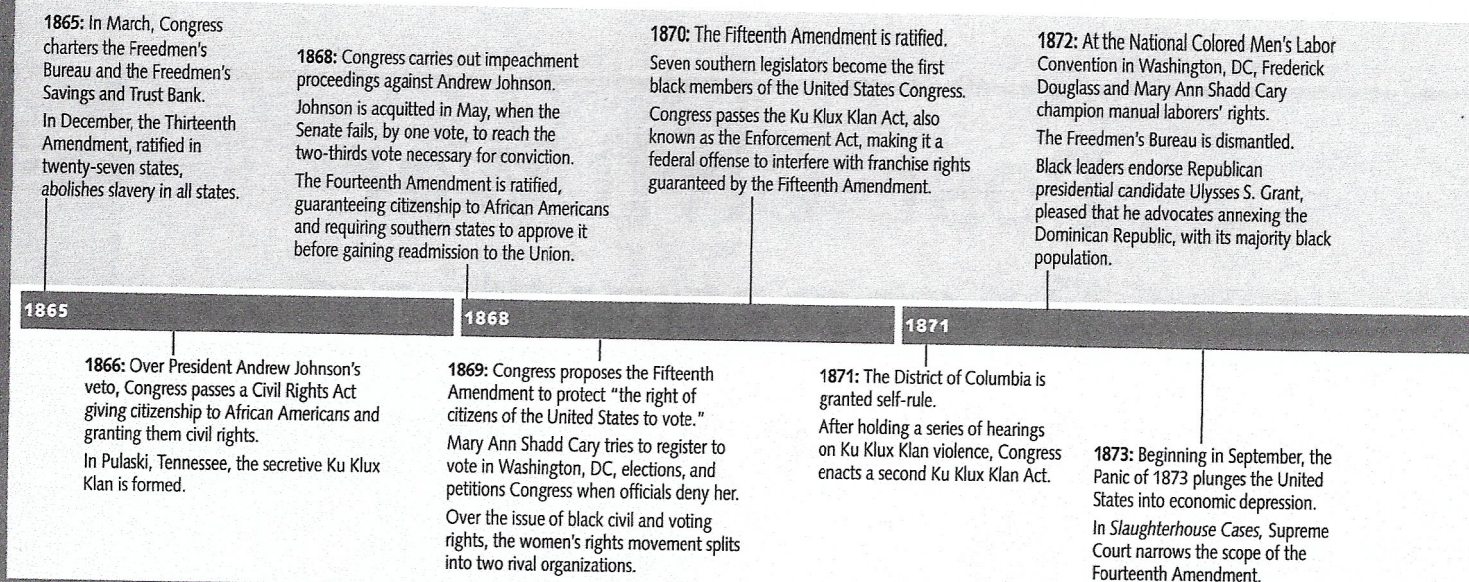
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Fortune was prepared to fight back. Reputedly "a remarkably fine shot [who] practiced target shooting regularly," he was remembered by friends as a "dead shot, and he *would* shoot." He fortified his home to provide cover from an attack. Under his bedroom floor, he dug a pit from which he could open fire on intruders. Though violent threats prompted Fortune to move his family from isolated rural Jackson County to the relative safety of a black neighborhood in the city of Jacksonville, Florida, in 1870, he never relinquished his political commitment. Over the next ten years, he served as city marshal, Republican national convention delegate, county commissioner, clerk of the city market, and state congressman.

Fortune's testimony before Congress reveals the realities of the postwar South. White southerners complained bitterly about what they called "black rule" as African Americans took positions as sheriffs, justices of the peace, county clerks, and school superintendents. Yet throughout the South, only a few dozen black Americans occupied positions of real authority. Relatively few black candidates ran for office, and many black voters, intimidated by threats or actual violence in the open southern polls, where each person's vote was public knowledge, supported white politicians. Those African Americans who did run for office encountered white resentment and often threats.

With the South's return to the Union after the Civil War, race relations in that embattled region took political center stage. For the first dozen years after the Confederacy's surrender—a period that became known as Reconstruction—the federal government sent troops and agents to help restore order to the battered South and aid slaves' transition to freedom. Federal and private agencies opened schools, distributed food and medicine, and intervened in legal disputes between freed people and their white neighbors. In what many northerners considered a new national era, the federal government aimed to heal the war-torn South and to make it more like the North, physically, economically, socially and politically. While repairing fields, roads, and homes was a top priority, many northerners hoped the South would soon have new railroads, factories, banks, and wage laborers as well.

Reconstruction also extended to the national level, as black men were elected to Congress and Republican presidents appointed African Americans to positions of authority. During this era, black leaders made access to the polls their highest priority, believing African Americans could vote into office leaders who supported their goals, such as farm ownership and jobs that would allow them to move away from livelihoods that depended on white landowners. They also wanted education for their children, as literacy would, in turn,

1874: The Freedmen's Savings and Trust Bank fails. The Virginia legislature reorganizes election districts to dilute the black vote.

1878: The Liberia Exodus Joint Stock Company sends the Azor to Africa.

1876: Harriet Purvis is elected first black president of the American Woman Suffrage Association.

1879: The Kansas Exodus Joint Stock Company sends emigrants west to Kansas.

1874

1875: Congress passes the Civil Rights Act, guaranteeing black Americans access to public accommodations.

1877

1877: A compromise between Congress and the Republican Party over the disputed presidential election results in complete withdrawal of federal troops from the South. The Republican Party establishes the Black and Tan Party, segregating black Americans from the mainstream Republican Party. A nationwide railroad workers' strike in July elevates Peter Clark, the first known African American socialist, to leadership.

provide opportunities for entrepreneurship and political power to lift people out of poverty.

Meanwhile, most northern and southern white Americans hoped to "reconstruct" a system that tied black Americans to menial roles. A few white Americans envisioned former bondspeople becoming successful landowners or entrepreneurs, although certainly not equal members of society. Though slavery had been outlawed, persuasion, local statutes, intimidation, and widespread prejudice kept black people tied to agricultural and service jobs in both South and North.

As we saw in Chapter 10, resentful southern planters also began instituting laws—Black Codes—to keep black people subservient. These laws they backed up with violence, threats, or economic reprisals, such as dismissing black farm workers who tried to vote or encouraged others to do so. The presence of the federal Freedmen's Bureau in the South, which aimed to help former slaves become full citizens, infuriated many white southerners. Many of these planters hoped to reconstruct the old agricultural system in which wealthy white men made the laws, leaving both white and black poor people powerless.

But black Americans had sweeping ambitions: strengthening their communities economically, reassembling their families, and protecting themselves from violence and intimidation. All of these goals hinged on acquiring and protecting political rights, navigating the shifting and sometimes treacherous tides

of southern and federal politics. Washington, DC—seat of the national government—symbolized the complexities of the new era. From across the nation, black Americans seeking employment and federal protection streamed into the capital city.

But federal sympathy toward freedmen and freedwomen waned after a decade of Reconstruction efforts, and federal promises went unfulfilled. Discouraged by slow progress, some black Americans again directed their hopes elsewhere—to African or western frontiers.



POSTWAR RECONSTRUCTION

On February 25, 1870, an ambitious, urbane southerner arrived in Washington, DC, with a mission: to ensure that the federal government treated black people as full citizens. That southerner was Hiram Revels—African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) minister, former Union recruitment officer, and advocate of improving education for black people. The first black American to be elected to Congress, Revels soon discovered how fervently white congressmen resented his presence. His public service career—beginning before the Civil War and continuing until his death in 1901—reveals much about how emancipation transformed black people and about the complexities of Reconstruction.

Radical Reconstruction

Revels found Congress dominated by a coalition of northern representatives known as Radical Republicans. These politicians aimed to protect and promote the interests of black southerners and to punish white southerners for the Civil War. Simultaneously, Congress clashed with the president over how to define and protect black rights. Though the war had ended, racial tensions between the North and South continued to simmer. The Radical Republicans constituted the majority in Congress when southern seats were vacant dur-

■ Hiram Revels helped recruit the first black Civil War regiments in Maryland and Missouri. After his U.S. Senate service, he returned to Mississippi and became president of Alcorn, a Reconstruction-era black college. This photo of Revels with his wife and five daughters was taken in about 1870.



ing the war. By the end of 1865, many southern states had ratified the Thirteenth Amendment and rejoined the Union—just in time to elect congressmen to reclaim their prewar seats. Because black men could not yet vote, the same southern white aristocrats who had ruled in Congress before the war simply returned to their former posts.

But Radical Republicans still held the majority. Led by Pennsylvania representative Thaddeus Stevens and Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner (who returned to the Senate in 1860), they asserted the right of Congress to refuse seats to southern congressmen who had not yet sworn Union allegiance. Next they strategized on how to get southern black candidates seated in Congress in order to drive southern white men from the legislature. Through the last half of the decade, Radical Republicans pounded the South with new policies. In early 1867, Congress passed three new Reconstruction acts. The first ruling divided the South into five military districts, sending federal troops to maintain order and protect freed people. The second required the former Confederate states to hold conventions to draft constitutions that guaranteed black male suffrage. The third act stipulated that former Confederate states could send congressmen to Washington, DC, only after state legislatures had ratified the Fourteenth Amendment. This amendment, ratified in 1868, was the most important product of the Reconstruction era. It affirmed black people's citizenship, removing every trace of ambiguity left from the Supreme Court's decision in the *Dred Scott* case of 1857. It also denied former slaveowners' claims that they should receive compensation for their lost "property." Emanuel Fortune, a delegate to Florida's constitutional convention, helped his state pass these provisions. Hoping to stir northern support for punishing southerners, Congress also established a Joint Committee on Reconstruction to gather information about southern anti-black violence.

Presidential Reconstruction

Black people across the nation hoped the Fourteenth Amendment would secure them a place in their nation's economic, political, and social life. However, a milder form of Reconstruction proposed by President Lincoln and favored by his successor, Andrew Johnson, enabled the white South to resist. Hoping to heal sectional bitterness, Lincoln and some northerners favored a less punitive way for the South to reenter the Union. The South, they contended, did not possess the authority to leave the United States. Hence, southern states had always remained in the Union, and thus technically did not need to rejoin.

When Lincoln was assassinated in April 1865, the presidency fell to Vice President Andrew Johnson. A former Democratic senator from Tennessee, Johnson also favored a lenient Reconstruction policy. Reversing Congress's Confiscation Act of 1862, which had allowed the federal government to seize Confederates' property without compensating them for it, Johnson offered to pardon and to restore the property of former Confederates who took an oath of allegiance to the Constitution. He also promised to restore their confiscated land. Finally, he acknowledged North Carolina's new government, which had been reconstructed with a new constitution following the Republican guidelines that provided black men with the vote. Johnson also encouraged the other Confederate states to quickly reestablish state governments.

Thus, black rights became the focal point as Johnson battled with Congress over which branch of government would wield power in the postwar era. President Johnson vetoed Congress's Civil Rights Act of 1866, which offered

limited legal rights to African Americans. He also vetoed a congressional vote to renew the Freedmen's Bureau. But Radical Republicans gathered enough votes to override Johnson's veto and pass both bills. The new president still opposed the Fourteenth Amendment because he felt it violated southern states' rights to control their citizenship. During the 1866 midterm campaign, he urged the southern states not to ratify it. His opposition only deepened the rift between the White House and Congress.

Tension between Johnson and Congress reached a climax when the president tried to remove Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, who oversaw the military occupation of the unreconstructed southern states. Johnson was incensed that Stanton encouraged military officers stationed in the South to ignore communications from the president. Seeking to undermine Johnson's authority, Congress passed the Tenure of Office Act. The ruling blocked Johnson from firing Stanton and guaranteed tenure of office to anyone appointed with the Senate's approval. Johnson responded by placing strict controls on military commanders in the South and renewing efforts to dismiss Stanton and other government officials sympathetic to congressional Reconstruction. Republicans promptly called for the president's impeachment on the grounds that he had violated several recent congressional edicts meant to prevent him from removing military or cabinet appointees without congressional approval. A three-month impeachment trial failed to remove Johnson, however, because the two-thirds majority required in the Senate fell one vote short. Once more, the contest for power between the South and branches of the federal government—ostensibly about black issues—only diverted federal attention from black people's needs.

The Fifteenth Amendment

The Fourteenth Amendment should have secured black freedom everywhere, but even as Congress enacted policies ensuring southern black men the franchise, northern black men

"They who desire the Right of Suffrage for Blacks of the South oppose the extension of the same right to Blacks of the North."
—*The New York Tribune*

with political ambitions had to head south to fulfill them. In a bitter irony, southern black men, so recently liberated from slavery, had more opportunities for political leadership than did black northerners. *The New York Tribune* put the matter bluntly:

"They who desire the Right of Suffrage for Blacks of the South oppose the extension of the same right to Blacks of the North."

This pattern of exclusion appeared in numerous northern states. In 1867, white voters in Kansas and Ohio banned

African Americans from the polls by referendum. The following year, white voters in Michigan promptly rejected a new Radical Republican constitution that included black suffrage. In Connecticut, New York, and Minnesota, when put to popular vote, black suffrage was defeated. Only in Iowa could Republicans procure black enfranchisement. To protest political exclusion, Equal Rights Leagues arose in the North. Consisting of alliances between black leaders and white former abolitionists, these organizations advocated for full political equality.

By the 1868 elections, northern voters had enough of the tug-of-war in Washington. They elected moderate Republicans intent on distancing themselves from the Radicals' platform, which focused not just on full civil rights for African Americans but also on women's suffrage and the rights of labor unions. Instead of expending energies in power struggles, the moderates supported the new president: military hero Ulysses S. Grant. With conservative governments victorious in Virginia by 1869 and in North Carolina and Georgia by 1871, aggressively pro-black Reconstruction all but vanished.

Now that Republican congressmen faced a conservative southern contingent, even moderate Republicans—most of whom had rejected a black suffrage amendment—began to see that northern black voters might help them win close congressional contests. So in February 1869, moderate Republicans proposed the Fifteenth Amendment, prohibiting federal and state governments from limiting the franchise because of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude." Former Confederate states wishing to return to the Union had to ratify the new amendment. Mississippi was among the first to comply. Upon its readmission, black voters sent state senator Hiram Revels to Washington to finish out the Senate term vacated by Jefferson Davis in 1861. As a black Pittsburgh teacher commented, "The Republican party had done the Negro good [in passing the Fifteenth Amendment], but they were doing themselves good at the same time." When Revels took his congressional seat, he was as much a symbol as a politician. To black Americans and Radical Republicans, he embodied victory in the battle for full black enfranchisement. (Indeed, the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified in March 1870, just as Revels took office.) His presence symbolized the South's defeat. To moderate Republicans, he represented a concession to Radical Republican schemes—one that would preserve Republican congressional dominance.

Black Suffrage and Women's Suffrage

The passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments exposed the fragility of the northern white and black reformer alliance. With Emancipation, war's end, and the Thirteenth Amendment, many white abolitionists were



- This popular portrait of the seven black congressmen, from spring of 1873, includes several who were ending their term and several just arriving. Missing is Pinckney Benton Stewart Pinchback, elected to the Senate from Louisiana in 1872.

satisfied that black rights would come in due course. While continuing to lobby for black rights, they diverted some of their energies to promoting full citizenship for women. This connection between black rights and women's rights had been marked as early as Frederick Douglass's attendance at the 1848 Women's Rights Convention at Seneca Falls, New York. Douglass and Elizabeth Cady Stanton had long been friends, as Douglass backed Stanton's claim that "the power to choose rulers and make laws was the right by which all others could be secured."

During the war, Stanton had circulated petitions supporting the Thirteenth Amendment outlawing slavery. With ratification of the amendment, she expected antislavery leaders like Wendell Phillips to support her women's agenda in return. At issue for her was the word *male* in the Fourteenth Amendment. Previously, women had assumed they were citizens. The new amendment, which specified voters as "male inhabitants," underscored women's exclusion from the political process. Furious, Stanton refused to support the Four-

teenth and Fifteenth Amendments. "My question," she challenged Phillips, "is do you believe the African race is composed entirely of males?" Stanton's friendship with Douglass also soured, as Douglass argued that the right to vote was more crucial for black men than for women. "The government of this country loves women," he contended, "but the Negro is loathed." Douglass feared a bill including enfranchisement of women could not pass, even in a Radical Republican Congress.

The question of whether women had as much right to vote as freedmen found few sympathizers, even among Radical Republicans. The majority of reformers adopted a "black men first" strategy. By opposing the Fourteenth and later the Fifteenth amendments, Stanton found herself

"The government of this country loves women, but the Negro is loathed."
—Frederick Douglass

■ **TABLE 11.1** The Federal Power Struggle 1865–1877

Black newspapers recognized that often white Americans' interest in Reconstruction involved a power struggle among the three branches of government rather than the best interests of black people or the South. African American concerns frequently faded into the background. Below are some of the battles that took place during the Reconstruction years.

Date	Congress	Presidency	Supreme Court
1865	Establishes Freedmen's Bureau	Andrew Johnson grants "amnesty and pardon" to most Confederates, restoring confiscated land, and exiling thousands of black farmers from their land	
1866	Passes Thirteenth Amendment, abolishing slavery in all states and territories; ratified by 27 states Expands Freedmen's Bureau authority and over Johnson's veto empowers it to try civil cases for freedmen Over Johnson's veto, passes three Civil Rights Acts, including one that vacates 1857 <i>Dred Scott</i> decision and granting citizenship to black Americans Passes Fourteenth Amendment, guaranteeing citizenship and requiring Confederate states' approval; ratified in 1868	Johnson vetoes two-year extension for Freedmen's Bureau Johnson vetoes Civil Rights Acts	In <i>Ex Parte Milligan</i> , rules that neither the president nor Congress has legal power to allow other agencies to try civilian cases, except in theater of war
1867		Enforces provisions of Civil Rights Acts	In <i>Cummings v. Missouri</i> , rules that government may not require voters to take oaths of past loyalty
1868	Passes Tenure of Office Act, forbidding president to remove Secretary of War Edwin Stanton Impeaches Johnson; conviction fails by one vote	Removes military officers from duty, including Secretary of War Edwin Stanton	Agrees to hear a southern state's case regarding the constitutionality of Reconstruction Acts Outlaws Maryland's race-based apprenticeship system
1869	Passes Fifteenth Amendment guaranteeing suffrage, requiring Confederate states to ratify; ratified in 1870		Upholds congressional authority to shape Reconstruction In <i>Texas v. White</i>, rules that Confederate officials had never left Union, since secession was illegal
1870–71	Passes Ku Klux Klan Acts Moderate Republicans refuse to seat black Louisiana Senator P. B. S. Pinchback		
1872	Passes Amnesty Act Dismantles Freedmen's Bureau		
1873			In <i>Slaughterhouse Cases</i> , rules that only the rights of federal citizenship are protected under Fourteenth Amendment; other rights at state discretion
1875	Passes Civil Rights Act guaranteeing freedmen access to public accommodations		
1877	Compromise installs Rutherford B. Hayes as president; federal troops withdrawn from South		



■ A woman who made her living by words, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1835–1911) often canonized black heroes in poetry. A staunch advocate of temperance and the franchise for women, she agonized over the tensions tearing at reformers' alliances as rival groups argued about the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments.

linked to anti-black forces. The issue split the women's movement. Remaining true to her abolitionist principles

"If colored men get their rights, and not colored women theirs, colored men will be masters over the women."—*Sojourner Truth*

that black suffrage was more important than women's suffrage, Lucy Stone founded the interracial American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA). She was soon joined by Harriet Purvis, who became its first black

president in 1876. Other reformers sought to promote the cause of women and African Americans equally. "If colored men get their rights, and not colored women theirs, colored

men will be masters over the women. . . . I am glad to see that men are getting their rights, but I want women to get theirs," said Sojourner Truth in a 1867 New York speech. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and Mary Ann Shadd Cary agreed. They joined Stanton and Susan B. Anthony in the National Woman Suffrage Association in 1869. Cary shared Anthony's interest in divorce reform and support for women entrepreneurs. Cary drafted a woman-suffrage statement to the House of Representatives and led a group of women who attempted to register to vote in the District of Columbia elections in 1869.

But soon Cary and other black women were put off by Stanton's and Anthony's impulsive rhetoric about "black [male] beasts" gaining the ballot before white women. In 1871, Cary broke away, establishing the Colored Woman's Progressive Franchise Association, which aimed to "take an aggressive stand against the assumption that men only [should vote]." Thus, in one of the nation's greatest ironies, the victory of enfranchisement for African Americans severed alliances between black leaders and white female reformers. When the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified in 1870, Douglass resumed his advocacy of women's suffrage, and slowly rebuilt his friendship with Stanton. But the contest between race progress and gender reform continued into the twenty-first century.



ELECTED BLACK LEADERS

Hiram Revels's election as the first black man to serve in the U.S. Senate was a mixed victory. The new senator found that northern and southern congressmen questioned his eligibility for the Senate. Had he been a citizen of the United States for the required nine years? After all, the Fourteenth Amendment granting citizenship had been ratified only two years before. By arguing that he had some white ancestors and therefore had been at least *partly* a citizen before 1868, Senator Revels succeeded in taking his seat.

Within months, six other African Americans joined Revels in Congress, thanks to the rising number of southern black voters. To represent South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi came former slaves and free men born in the North and the South. All seven knew their fellow congressmen would feel—at best—ambivalent about their presence. Yet they set out to help maintain a Republican majority in Congress and to sustain their party's commitment to African Americans. Black Americans celebrated what promised to be a new national era. Frederick Douglass, who had long maintained that each black man must be "a voter in the North and in the South," reveled in the tri-



Frances Ellen Watkins Harper Proposes Women's Leadership

In April 1875, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper spoke before the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, recommending that black Americans avoid dependence on white Americans' kindness. She maintained that black women should take leadership roles in designing African Americans' future.

The great problem to be solved by the American people, is this: Whether or not there is enough strength in democracy, virtue enough in our civilization, and power enough in our religion to have mercy and deal justly with four millions of people but lately translated from the old oligarchy of slavery to the new commonwealth of freedom. . . . The most important question before us colored people is not simply what the Democratic party may do against us or the Republican party do for us; but what are we going to do for ourselves?

Before our young men is another battle—not a battle of flashing swords and clashing steel, but a moral warfare, a battle against ignorance, poverty and low social condition. . . .

Give power and significance to your life, and in the great work of upbuilding there is room for woman's work and woman's heart. . . .

—from Centennial Anniversary of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery (1876).

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umph of enfranchisement for black men. He envisioned a day when black northerners also would have the voting strength to elect black representatives.

Black congressmen were pragmatic about the limits of their new power. Familiar with the ways of white southerners, they recognized the need to compromise with white men if they hoped to accomplish their goals. Revels offered reassurance to those white Americans who feared politically powerful black men: "The white race has no better friend than I. I am true to my own race. I wish to see all done that can be done . . . to assist [black men] in acquiring property,

in becoming intelligent, enlightened . . . citizens . . . but at the same time, I would not have anything done which would harm the white race."

"We all have to go armed in the South, ready at a moment's warning to sell our lives if it is necessary."

—Hiram Revels

Yet along with white deference, Revels lobbied for integrated schools. "Prejudice has no cause to justify it," he stated. "We must admit that it is wicked. . . . I hold it to be the duty of this nation to discourage it, because it is wicked, because it is wrong." Recognizing the atmosphere of violence in which

black politicians operated, he recommended self-defense. "We all have to go armed in the South," he reported, "ready at a moment's warning to sell our lives if it is necessary." Delicately balancing humility, resolution, and self-protection, Revels worked for political progress.

Like Revels, fellow Mississippian Blanche K. Bruce also hoped compromise with white southerners could spur black progress. A well-educated man who had held local offices, Bruce was elected to the Senate in 1874. He joined southern white senators in lobbying for federal funds to improve Mississippi's ports. At the same time, he advocated full citizenship for Chinese and Native Americans. These groups, he figured, would increase the Republican Party's membership.

Many black congressmen looked for ways to gain white allies. Hiram Revels and Alabama's representative Benjamin Turner were among those African American politicians who voted for the Amnesty Act of 1872, which would remove restrictions on former Confederates' political participation. Revels explained to his constituency that accommodating white southerners "got colored mechanics in the United States Navy Yard for the first time." By using compromise and accommodation, Mississippi's Blanche K. Bruce negotiated alliances that brought black people jobs in post offices, customs offices, and Freedmen's Bureau offices across the South. Black representatives in Washington also

■ **TABLE 11.2** The Black Men Who Went to Congress in 1870

Most African American congressmen were young, ambitious, and outspoken. All represented the South, though some were born in the North. Some brought prestigious educational credentials; others brought a wisdom born of life experience. Here is a look at the first seven black men who were elected to Congress. Most went on to fruitful careers following their terms in Congress.

<i>Name/State/ Age in 1870</i>	<i>Background</i>	<i>Prior experience</i>	<i>Service in Congress</i>	<i>Post-Congress experience</i>
Blanche K. Bruce (1841–1898) Mississippi 29 years old	Born slave in Virginia to master and slave woman	Studied at Oberlin College; Mississippi tax assessor, superintendent of education, alderman, sheriff	Senate, 1875–1881. Supported seating of P. B. S. Pinchback, Mississippi River flood control and port development, citizenship for Chinese and Native Americans, dissolving all-black regiments	1881–1893: Register of the Treasury and DC Recorder of Deeds; trustee of Howard University
Richard H. Cain (1825–1887) South Carolina 45 years old	Born free in western Virginia to black mother, Cherokee father	Studied at Wilberforce College; delegate to SC state constitutional convention; served in SC state senate	House of Representatives 1873–1874; 1877–79. Opposed Amnesty Act; supported woman suffrage, education, and land	1878: Encouraged South Carolinians to support Liberia exodus
Robert DeLarge (1842–1874) South Carolina 28 years old	Born free in Virginia	SC constitutional convention (1868) and state legislature	House of Representatives, 1871–1873. Removed from office 2 months before his term expired because white opponent won contested election. Supported Amnesty Act, black land ownership	Magistrate in Charleston
Robert Brown Elliott (1842–1884) South Carolina 28 years old	Born in South Carolina to free black parents	Passed SC bar in 1867; editor of black Republican newspaper, the <i>South Carolina Leader</i> ; SC constitutional convention; assistant adjutant-general of SC	House of Representatives, 1871–1875. Supported suppression of Ku Klux Klan, protection of black vote	Lawyer in New Orleans, Louisiana
Jefferson Long (1836–1900) Georgia 34 years old	Born a slave in Georgia to slave mother and white father	Tailor	House of Representatives, 1871–1873. Supported Ku Klux Klan Acts, opposed amnesty for ex-Confederates	Tailoring business suffered because of his continued organizing for Republican Party
John Roy Lynch (1847–1939) Mississippi 23 years old	Louisiana slave, freed when Union army seized Natchez, 1863	Elected justice of the peace; Mississippi legislature speaker of the house	House of Representatives, 1872–1876. Supported civil rights legislation	Delegate to four national Republican conventions; appointed by President Benjamin Harrison to be auditor of the U.S. Treasury for the Navy Department
Pinckney Benton Stewart Pinchback (1837–1921) Louisiana 33 years old	Born free to Georgia planter and an emancipated slave	Louisiana state senator; lieutenant governor; acting governor	Senate: elected in 1872, but never allowed to assume office. Advocated education, women's suffrage	U.S. Customs inspector; cotton planter; owner of Mississippi riverboat company; admitted to Louisiana bar in 1886; helped found Southern Normal School

cut deals that brought black cadets to West Point and the Naval Academy.

Maneuvering through Washington's corridors of power, black politicians understood that their constituents were vulnerable and their own positions fragile. They sought issues on which they could negotiate with white allies without trading away too many black political gains. The balancing act demanded constant attention and vigilance.

Some outspoken black congressmen refused to compromise or negotiate. "In my state, since emancipation there have been over five hundred loyal men shot down by the disloyal men there, and not one of those men who took part in committing those outrages has ever been brought to justice," said Congressman Jefferson Long of Georgia. "Those disloyal people still hate this Government, [and] when loyal men dare to carry the 'stars and stripes' through our streets, they are turned out of employment. When we take the men who commit these outrages before judges and juries, we find that these courts and juries remain in the hands of the very Ku Klux themselves."

Uncompromising black congressmen like Long found it difficult to push their agenda. Too few in number and too new to politics, they struggled to represent their constituents' concerns. Sometimes simply being heard was all they could hope for. For example, Long voted against the Amnesty Act, knowing this would further isolate him in a Congress bent on reconciliation. Richard Cain, a representative from South Carolina, also voted no. "I want to see a change in this country," said Cain, a northern-born minister whose calling had taken him South to fight for black justice. "Instead of colored people being always penniless, I want to see them coming in with their mule teams and ox teams, with their corn and potatoes to exchange for silks and satins. I want to see children coming to enjoy life as it ought to be enjoyed." Cain doubted that reinstating political rights to Confederates would help realize this vision. Several other black congressmen also voted no on amnesty. Even red-inked letters from the Ku Klux Klan warning of "doom sealed in blood" could not deter these men from speaking out—knowing their arguments fell on deaf ears.

Young black congressmen sought counsel from seasoned political activists like Frederick Douglass. The esteemed black leader befriended them, often hosting them at his home. Yet even Douglass misread the political realities of Reconstruction. In the 1872 presidential race, Douglass supported Republican President Ulysses S. Grant's bid for reelection. True, Grant had demonstrated only lukewarm support for black rights, but he represented the political party that had freed slaves, and he had opposed President Andrew Johnson. Grant suggested annexing the Dominican Republic—which had a large black population

and was adjacent to the black Caribbean island republic of Haiti—to provide a haven where African Americans could escape white oppression while maintaining U.S. citizenship. Douglass believed in Grant's goodwill.

Douglass did not question Grant's motives, but others—notably Douglass's abolitionist friend Senator Charles Sumner, who chaired the Senate Foreign Relations Committee—suspected that annexation was a scheme to enrich white land speculators. Douglass continued to support the president, even when Grant refused to invite black representatives to the White House dinner where legislators were to discuss annexation. The black leader counted on the president's good intentions and hoped Grant would reward him with a federal appointment. With support from the black voters Douglass helped deliver, Grant won reelection—but neither annexation of the Dominican Republic nor a federal appointment for Douglass materialized. Black people now had another reminder that their vote wielded little influence unless they could enlist support from powerful white allies.

Local Politics in the South

"When we opened the school a party of armed men came to my house, seized me, carried me out and threw me in Thompson's Creek after they had belabored me with the muzzles of their revolvers . . . [saying] they 'did not want . . . any damned nigger school in that town and were not going to have it,'" Texas state senator George Ruby recalled while testifying about obstacles facing southern black politicians at the state and local levels. Some of these challenges centered on crafting effective political strategies and alliances; others involved ensuring constituents' safety in a hostile environment. Whatever forms the difficulties took, local black



politicians had few southern white allies. In the South, local politics and politicians saw little intercession by white Radical Republicans on behalf of black concerns. Even the presence of federal troops could not deter threats such as those Ruby endured for merely opening a school.

Ruby quickly learned the Texas political terrain. Born in New York and educated in New England, he had lived for a while in Haiti but returned to the United States to work for the Freedmen's Bureau. Assigned to build schools in Texas, he also represented Galveston County at the Texas constitutional convention in 1868. This experience gained him the visibility to be elected to the state senate in 1869.

One of only two black state senators in Texas, Ruby had a constituency mainly of black voters and the minority of white politicians who were bent on securing federal assistance for rebuilding the state's infrastructure, refurbishing the Galveston port, and establishing an educational system benefiting poor Texans of all races.

Like Revels and other black leaders at the national level, Ruby used compromise and negotiation. He supported white Texans as well as black for patronage positions, and he tolerated the new state laws segregating public travel, parks, and even Republican political events. In return, he hoped to gain white support for laws that would restrain the Klan, give citizenship and the franchise to Native Americans (who would presumably increase the Republican party rolls), and promote schools and other services to improve the lives of freed people. He also hoped to contain the growing institution of Black Codes, those state or local laws restricting African Americans' employment choices, land ownership, free mobility, and other opportunities.

Ruby's strategy reflected his understanding of southern political realities. In the postwar era, southern politics took one of three forms: the political middle—which consisted of the vast majority of white southerners, the political right, and the radical left. The political middle, or “moderates,” included many entrepreneurs and professionals as well as farmers. Many in this group had concluded even before the war that the South needed to modernize—to diversify their region's economy, develop technology and industry, and avail themselves of federal subsidies for geological surveys, railroads, factories, and ports. Moderate white southerners were not particularly interested in economic advancement for African Americans, but they envisioned black laborers as part of the new South, working in factories as well as in fields. They welcomed alliances with black leaders whom they felt could help persuade black communities to meet moderate white people's goals. As long as leaders like Ruby stayed “in their place”—that is, deferential to white people—white moderates supported black education and voting rights.

South Carolina planter Wade Hampton exemplified white moderates. Hampton believed black and white southerner leaders should unite in rebuilding the South. “Does not that glorious southern sun above us shine alike for both of us?” he asked. But Hampton and other moderates made no overtures toward social integration, viewing class and racial divisions as natural for society.

Black leaders like George Ruby cultivated political connections with white moderates like Wade Hampton among his constituency. With such alliances, he could build support

for black people to obtain broader access to education and jobs in agriculture or factories. This was better than joblessness or the specter of black southerners migrating to the North in large numbers in search of jobs—a situation neither white southerners nor white northerners wanted.

Martin Delany also advocated black-white alliances. Filling in as editor for South Carolina's *Missionary Record*, Delany developed a blueprint for black-white cooperation. He felt certain that “the black man and the white man must work together . . . [to] bring about the redemption of the state and prosperity and happiness for the whole people.” At the same time, he

shuddered at the ever-increasing threats from such groups as the Ku Klux Klan, the Knights of the White Camellias, and the White Leagues. “The black men of this state are dependent on the whites, just as the whites are dependent on them,” he wrote in 1873. Thus, he advised black southerners to relinquish “hatred and resentment” and to show themselves as “polite, pleasant, agreeable, ever ready and obliging.”

Persuaded by Hampton's argument that “when all our troubles and trials are over, [black and white southerners] will sleep in that same soil in which we first drew breath,” Delany supported Hampton's successful bid for governor of South Carolina in 1876.

At the political right stood what some might call radical reactionaries, a small but significant group of white southerners. These included dislocated plantation owners who had lost their economic system, and a few struggling white farmers who had an emotional investment in the South's old way of life, which had given even poor white people a higher status than black people. Their anger at the ravages of war prevented them from embracing any part of a new order that enabled African Americans to progress beyond a servile role. Intent on reviving the prewar agricultural economy, radical reactionaries needed laborers to work the land, and they wanted freed slaves to do the job. They had little interest in modernizing the South and were the ones who most often instigated violence against black people. Black politicians did their best to avoid them.

The South's radical left—the third political group—argued that poor black people had more in common with poor white people than with wealthy black ones. That is, class was more important than race in working to achieve goals. Their view of a postwar South included interracial politics based on unity among poor people regardless of race. Their

“The black man and the white man must work together.”—Martin Delany





Madison Hemings Recalls His Family History

Madison Hemings's story, published in 1873, reinforced white southerner's fears about interracial relations. In this interview, the sixty-eight-year-old Hemings describes a family with a biracial background. Born in Virginia, Hemings identified himself both as a black American and as the son of United States president Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson's white descendants denied this relationship until DNA testing in 1999 confirmed the story.

[After the death of his wife, Thomas Jefferson] left for France, taking his eldest daughter with him. . . . My mother accompanied her as her body servant. During that time my mother became Mr. Jefferson's concubine. . . . He promised her . . . that her children should be freed at the age of twenty-one years. . . . She gave birth to four [children] and Jefferson was the father of all of them. Their names were Beverly, Harriet, Madison (myself) and Eston. We all became free . . . [and] all married and have raised families.

Beverly left Monticello and went to Washington as a white man. He married a white woman in Maryland, and their only child, a daughter, was not known by the white folks to have any colored blood coursing through her veins. Beverly's wife's family were people in good circumstances.

Harriet married a white man in good standing in Washington City, whose name I could give, but

will not, for prudential reasons. She raised a family of children, and so far as I know they were never suspected of being tainted with African blood in the community where she lived or lives. I have not heard from her for ten years, and do not know whether she is dead or alive. She thought it to her interest, on going to Washington, to assume the role of a white woman. . . .

Eston married a colored woman in Virginia, and moved from there to Ohio. . . .

I married Mary McCoy. Her grandmother was a slave, and lived with her master, Stephen Hughes, near Charlottesville, as his wife. She was manumitted by him, which made her children free. Mary McCoy's mother was his daughter.

—from *The Pike County [Ohio] Republican*, March 13, 1873.

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concerns included universal education, more equitable land policies, better contracts for renters, and politicians who advocated the rights of the poor. Some of their beliefs were based on socialism, a political philosophy for establishing a government that distributed wealth equally among all its members. This philosophy, which defined economic circumstance as more important than race or ethnicity, gained favor with many of the world's poor people in the late nineteenth century. Many black sharecroppers and laborers indeed understood they had more in common with poor white farmers than with wealthy black planters who benefited from the same exploitative sharecropping and tenant systems used by white planters.

As steel and mining industries began to bring about the hoped-for modernizing of southern cities like Birmingham, Alabama, and Atlanta, Georgia, a black laborers' movement gathered momentum in the South, taking some

of its energy from alliances with white radicals. A small but vocal minority of southern white labor organizers embraced black radicals like Lucy Parsons, (an early organizer of Texas's Socialist Workingmen's Party, which advocated interracial labor unions), and Peter Clark of Cincinnati, Ohio, who traveled through the North and the South urging industrial workers to put class unity above racial division. Parsons, who was married to a white Texas socialist, exemplified much of what conservative white southerners feared: miscegenation, or sexual liaison between black and white people. Though such "race-mixing" was common under slavery, white planters feared that in post-slavery times, mixed-race people would feel entitled to the privileges of white Americans.

Only the most optimistic of black Americans joined the socialist ranks. Most soon recognized that white socialists

had little power to effect real change. However, the idea of political parties that subordinated racial differences to class loyalty remained alive for decades. In the 1890s, when the Populist Party emerged to put many of these concerns on the national agenda, poor black southerners counted among its strongest supporters.

White Backlash

Even outside the South, white Americans found many ways to keep black people “in their place.” Immediately after Congress introduced the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery, white-on-black violence intensified in the North. The same night President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, an Ohio mob torched the main building of the black Wilberforce University. The blaze destroyed all of Martin Delany’s correspondence, manuscripts, and African art collections. “The hand that placed the torch,” wrote Delany, was “leagued in sentiment with the same dastardly villains who struck down the greatest Chief Magistrate [Lincoln] of the present age.”

Indeed, that hand had a broad span. In Philadelphia and San Francisco, in the late 1860s, white trolley riders forcibly repelled black ones when they tried to board the public transit system. In Rochester, New York, in the winter of 1867, Frederick Douglass’s son-in-law, who operated a taxi pulled by what observers described as “a handsome span of greys [horses],” was so badly menaced by other drivers that he quit the trade. That same winter, in the Freedmen’s Bureau offices in Washington, DC, General Oliver O. Howard had to threaten to fire his white clerks to get them to accept black coworkers.

In the South, members of the Ku Klux Klan, cloaked in white hoods, galloped on horseback to the homes of black political leaders and their supporters who tried to vote, or those who had become economically comfortable, or supposedly did not show due deference to whites. The attackers often dragged black people out of their homes and whipped or tortured them. Sometimes they killed them, mutilated them, set them on fire, or hanged them from trees—a practice that became known as *lynching*.

Between 1868 and 1876, while an estimated 20,000 black people were murdered by the Ku Klux Klan, southern officials looked the other way. Many of the victims had played an active role in local politics. One Alabama woman said the Klan had murdered her husband because “he just would hold up his head and say he was a strong Radical.” Klan members meted out countless other brutal beatings to people who, like Ruby, did nothing more radical than build a school or exude confidence. Another woman reported that the “Ku Klux came to my house and took us out and whipped us, and then said ‘don’t lets hear any big talk from you, and don’t sass any white ladies.’” Yet

another woman received “forty licks with a hickory and [was] kicked in the head and hit with a pistol” to ensure that she would not “sauc[e] [be impertinent to] white women.”

The Klan’s tactics helped overturn Republican Party control in Georgia in 1870, as terrified black voters stayed away from the polls.

The following year, Mississippi Klansmen burned dozens of black churches and schools, torturing and killing the ministers and teachers. Still, many black southerners fol-

lowed the lead of the Alabaman who said, “The Republican party freed me, and I will die on top of it. I vote every time. I will stick with the Republican party and die in it.”

Klansmen did not limit their assaults to black people. They also harassed and murdered the few poor or idealistic southern white citizens who supported socialist groups and advocated racial equality. One white South Carolina Republican reported being “thrashed” by the Ku Klux Klan because he agreed to have polls situated at his residence,

The Republican party freed me, and I will die on top of it.”—*Alabama black man*



■ After Emanuel Fortune’s death in 1903, his son, journalist Timothy Thomas Fortune, reported, “It was natural [for him] to take the leadership in any independent movement of Negroes.”

where he welcomed black Republicans and refused entrance to two Democratic voters.

The Enforcement Acts

The Fifteenth Amendment gave all black American men the right to vote—but securing that right in practical terms presented an entirely separate challenge. Affirming the federal commitment to the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, Congress passed two Enforcement Acts in 1870 and 1871—also known as the Klan Acts, because they were an effort to protect black voters from Ku Klux Klan violence. Both acts defined interference with a person's right to vote as a federal offense punishable by fine or imprisonment. In the summer of 1871, responding to Freedmen's Bureau reports of continued attacks against black southerners, Congress collected testimony from Emanuel Fortune, Robert Meacham, and hundreds of others to learn whether southern voters indeed were still unable to express their political views safely. The hearings produced thirteen volumes of testimony. In one dramatic account, a black Arkansas Republican organizer told of relying on sentinels, coded signals, and the use of religious rhetoric to convince white passersby that a political rally was "only a nigger prayer meeting."

The Enforcement Acts did little to stop violence against black people. In Louisville, Kentucky, white people mobbed and pummeled black residents who exercised their recently court-won right to ride the trolley cars. In Colfax, Louisiana, long-simmering racial hatred led local black men to arm themselves and patrol the town to protect their families from attack by white people. In a confrontation on Easter Sunday, 1873, between the black militia and the white sheriff and a posse of white men he had pulled together, the two groups exchanged fire. The battle ended with more than a dozen white men killed or wounded and two dozen black men injured. About three dozen black men were arrested and executed without a trial. Frederick Douglass's *New National Era* reported that in the wake of the incident, the local White League, bringing in guns and cannons from neighboring states, randomly shot, stabbed, and beat black citizens. They intended, they said, to set an example for "every parish in the State [so] we shall begin to have some quiet and niggers will know their place."

Racial violence broke out in the North as well. In Philadelphia, the federal government sent in a company of marines to protect black voters in the 1870 national election. The following year, when the government failed to provide such protection, a white mob murdered Octavius Catto at his Philadelphia polling place. Catto's leadership in the Pennsylvania Equal Rights League had made him a target. Having served as a major in the Union army, Catto was a beloved

school principal after the war. One of his friends lamented, "The Ku Klux of the South are not by any means the lower classes of society. The same may be said of the Ku Klux of the North. Both are industriously engaged in trying to break us down." Black Americans had witnessed yet another instance of their government's inability to protect them.

The Freedmen's Bank

If reconstructing the nation politically posed daunting challenges, establishing a firm economic foundation for African Americans proved even more difficult. In 1865, Congress chartered a new bank: the Freedmen's Savings and Trust Company. It offered black people the opportunity for leadership and to save money and it made loans to help purchase land and farm equipment.

In 1870, the *New National Era* gave glowing reports of the bank's progress. Though Congress did not assume responsibility for monitoring the bank's operations, thousands of black depositors in Washington, Baltimore, New York, Louisville, and dozens of other cities trusted the bank as they painstakingly saved for businesses, farms, equipment, and homes. Year by year, coin by coin, they accumulated nest eggs they hoped would give them financial autonomy.

But the bank soon fell on hard times. In its first years, several well-known white bankers—along with Freedmen's Bureau director Oliver Howard and a national board of four dozen trustees—oversaw operations. They upheld the congressional mandate of investing depositors' money in government securities. But in 1870, during a postwar building boom and railroad expansion, Congress amended the bank's charter, enabling the managers to invest deposits in real estate and railroads. In the next few years, several white members of the bank's board secretly made unsuccessful speculative loans in these industries. By the time the results of these investments became known, the men who managed them had resigned, leaving a core of mostly black trustees to repair the damage. As one black trustee put it, "We trustees—meeting but once a month, and then only hearing statements—could really know nothing about the affairs of the bank."

Desperate to maintain black people's confidence in the bank, the trustees called on the well-respected Frederick Douglass to replace the white bank president. Douglass did so, even investing \$10,000 of his own money. Yet he could not prevent the trustees from approving more bad loans. Failing to persuade Congress to salvage the bank, Douglass presided over its closing in July 1874.

As the savings of thousands of African Americans evaporated, some blamed the bank's failure on Douglass, leaving his reputation seriously tarnished. Discouraged that Congress had offered no assistance, numerous African

Americans also lost their faith in the federal government, convinced their government had abandoned them yet again.



WASHINGTON, DC, IN THE NEW NATIONAL ERA

The seat of both hope and disappointment, Washington, DC, became a magnet for black Americans. By 1870, African Americans constituted more than 30 percent of the capital city's population of 132,000—a dramatic increase from 10 percent of the city's population just ten years before. Due in part to its proximity to the South, the black population of Washington soon eclipsed even that of Philadelphia and Baltimore both in absolute numbers and in proportion. The nation's capital offered black people greater economic and social opportunities than any other city. Along with federal protection and political power came black organizations and businesses. Churches, fraternal organizations, debate clubs, the new Preparatory High School (later renamed for black poet Paul Laurence Dunbar), black-owned stores and hotels, and the plentiful jobs generated by the federal bureaucracy all made Washington alluring for those with the resources to take advantage of them.

The Black Elite

Drawn by the federal government and Howard University, many accomplished African Americans settled in the capital city. Frederick Douglass moved to Washington during the 1870s, working with his sons to publish the *New National Era*. The news weekly chronicled the explosive political progress of the Republican Party and its new black constituency. Douglass himself had launched what would become a quarter-century-long career in government service as the District of Columbia Recorder of Deeds and as director of U.S. diplomatic relations with Haiti. John Mercer Langston, the Oberlin-educated lawyer and Equal Rights League activist, came to Washington from Ohio to direct the law curriculum at Howard University. Langston also served as counsel to the city Board of Health, collecting vital statistics and monitoring the city's health measures.

Douglass and Langston were central figures in a growing cadre of Washington intellectuals. Anticipating ties with well-read companions and enjoying sophisticated conversation with like-minded colleagues and friends, they encouraged those with similar tastes to join them.

Many black poets, essayists, novelists, and public speakers responded to the call. Literate women such as Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Maria Stewart, and Charlotte Forten were among them. Harper became a frequent lecturer, while Stewart taught in the public schools. Stewart also served as a matron at the Freedmen's Hospital, established by the Freedmen's Bureau to provide medical care for Washington's black population. Though long retired from public speaking, she did not lose her feminist drive. In 1878 she published her speeches on women's rights. Charlotte Forten arrived in Washington from the South Carolina Sea Islands in 1864, exhausted and ill after eighteen months of teaching. In the capital city, she became one of fifteen black female clerks employed in the Treasury Department.

The black elite of Washington, DC—around 2 percent of the city's black population—consisted of lawyers, doctors, teachers, publishers, and business owners. Many were of mixed-race background, and their families had been free a generation or more. Thus they had been able to educate themselves and establish businesses or professions that gave them influence far beyond their small numbers. They provided employment for many members of the newer free black community. For example, James Wormley's hotel near the White House drew praise from European and American guests, as it provided a handsome living to its black proprietor and steady employment for black workers. These individuals led black social clubs, churches, schools, and social service agencies. Some even lived in integrated neighborhoods. They sent their children to the growing number of African American colleges and universities. A few young people attended the small number of white colleges—including Bowdoin, Amherst, Oberlin, and the University of Pennsylvania—that had begun accepting black students. Thus the black people in these wealthy, educated circles prepared their children and grandchildren to become Washington's future leaders.

Shopkeepers and service workers formed the core of Washington's black middle class. They enjoyed the chance to rub shoulders not only with Washington's black politicians and intellectuals but also with renowned social activists such as Sojourner Truth. In 1874, Truth became the first African American to take communion at the white Metropolitan Methodist Church. She also spoke before the white congregation of First Congregational Church, where General Oliver Howard called for desegregation. However, she focused her attention on the desperate situation of black people outside in the streets. Seeing black "men and women taking dry bread from the government to keep from starving," she set out to get "land for these people, where they can work and earn their own living." She had the ear of General Howard, who offered money and moral support for



The New National Era Reports on Washington Social Life

Members of Washington's small black middle class sometimes enjoyed a luxurious social life, as evidenced by the New National Era's report of Cordelia Downing's wedding in 1870. Her father, George T. Downing, was a caterer who ran the restaurant for the House of Representatives.

The long-anticipated matrimonial affair in high colored circles came off this evening. About one hundred ladies and gentlemen . . . were assembled. Among the more prominent present were Senator Revels of Mississippi, Frederick Douglass, Professor Wilson, cashier of the Freedmen's Savings Bank, [and] Dr. Purvis. . . .

The bride . . . is a young lady of twenty-one years, petite in figure and of more than ordinary beauty. . . . The groom, Mark R. De Mortie, is at

present engaged in business in Richmond, Virginia, where he is one of the owners of a manufactory of oil of sassafras. . . .

The guests then retired to an elaborate supper . . . [in a room] fitted up for the occasion, the ceiling being made up of American flags. . . .

—from *The New National Era*, May 26, 1870.

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her plan to help freedmen obtain farmland in the West by taking advantage of the 1862 Homestead Act. Truth also assisted Freedmen's Bureau agents in relocating refugees from Washington to Ohio and Michigan.

The Black Working Class and Poor

Like Sojourner Truth, Mary Ann Shadd Cary was concerned with the plight of ordinary black people. Widowed in 1860 with two children to rear, Cary moved to Washington permanently in 1869. Believing black people needed their own legal counseling, she became Howard University's first female law student. Encouraged by her family, Cary also assumed leadership in other areas where she felt black communities needed to make progress. She left Howard University in 1871 to go on the lecture circuit, speaking out about the need to ensure that young African Americans gained access to education and employment opportunities—a notion that became a theme for black leaders in the century ahead.

Cary's concern for the working class had deepened as she reflected on the experiences of her son, Linton, who worked as a messenger in the House of Representatives, and her daughter, Sarah, a dressmaker's apprentice. In 1873 she and Frederick Douglass spoke before the National Colored Men's Labor Convention, stressing again the need for educational programs that would teach job skills such as black-

smithing, dressmaking, and carpentry to black youth. That year, as an economic depression—the Panic of 1873—gripped America, Cary's anxiety deepened.

The Panic of 1873, the result of overinflated railroad speculation, decreased European demand for American farm products, and the failure of powerful American banks decreased job opportunities for all Americans, especially unskilled black workers. In 1874, Cary wrote two articles to provoke black parents' thinking about employment for their sons. "I have a boy who must and shall have a trade, and yet where may he learn it, or where exercise it when learned?" she asked. "We have members of State Legislatures . . . [and] aspirants in the field of letters, all of which is enjoyably rose-tinted and gilded as compared to the past; but we, no more than

others, can afford to build at the top of the house only. . . . [T]he craftsman, the architect, the civil engineer must all come through the door opened to us by the mechanic." Cary believed most young black workers would be more able to benefit from training in—and be able to find work in—man-

The craftsman, the architect, the civil engineer must all come through the door opened to us by the mechanic."—*Mary Ann Shadd Cary*



■ A woman of strong opinions, Mary Ann Shadd Cary caught the attention of outspoken white women, including fellow Washington lawyer Belva Lockwood. Throwing her energies into Lockwood's 1872 presidential campaign, Cary hoped to show her support not only for black rights but also for women's leadership.

ual trades rather than in intellectual or political leadership roles. In succeeding years, many black leaders shared her concern for the fate of the average worker.

Cary's concerns about the lack of economic opportunities for African Americans deepened when she saw the widespread poverty in the nation's capital. More than three-quarters of Washington's black families lived in alleys next to large houses where they served as laundresses, porters, handymen, and domestic servants. In the crowded alleys near the Capitol and along the Potomac River lived those who worked in government service. Many of these black households, teeming with family members and boarders, experienced living conditions as bleak as those under slavery. Malnutrition, poor health, violence, and alcoholism plagued them. Fish from local rivers and lakes and vegetables from urban gardens helped ward off starvation, but some black people resorted to prostitution and petty theft in order to survive. Others returned home to the familiar rural South. As black historian John Hope Franklin observed, "It was one thing to provide temporary relief for freedmen, and another to guide them along the road to economic stability and independence."

Despite these difficulties, many freed people managed to build vibrant communities in the capital city. The streets of Washington's poor black neighborhoods rang with the shouts of children playing games, adults performing music, and residents regaling each other with stories.

But there was typically a large gap between black political leaders, who were often economically well off, at least comparatively, and newly freed black people, who were mainly of the working class. Some black leaders—both social advocates and politicians—lost touch with the needs of ordi-

nary black people. While they took seriously their role as advocates for racial and economic justice, their own lives came to include second homes at summer resorts, international travel, and interracial marriages. Many seemed to forget the impact of slavery on the present generation. Cary was one leader who never forgot; she dedicated herself to working for economic stability and independence for the poor.

Political Patronage and Politics

In 1871, Congress established a local government for the District of Columbia consisting of a governor and eleven commissioners appointed by the president, and a twenty-two-member board of delegates, elected by popular vote, with the power to make local laws. Though the District had no voice in Congress or in national politics, as the states did, respected black leaders—including Frederick Douglass and AME bishop James A. Handy—were elected to the board of delegates and hence had a say in local politics. The new structure, which replaced the haphazard and inefficient older structure whereby the District was governed under several conflicting jurisdictions, was seen by many northern leaders as an improvement over the old charter that had expired in 1870.

Though African Americans were in a minority in this interracial governing group, the restructured District government signaled a friendly attitude toward black residents, and dozens of loyal black Republican supporters were rewarded with political patronage positions in such agencies as the Board of Health and the Recorder of Deeds office, Patent Office, Treasury Department, Post Office, public schools, and municipal utilities. Hundreds more found employment in the new district as government clerks and service workers. Local ordinances outlawed racial segregation in public services, and operators of hotels, restaurants, concert halls, and theaters paid fines and saw their licenses suspended if they breached these laws. The Civil Rights Act of 1875, though soon to be overturned by the Supreme Court, reinforced open access to public accommodations.

Steady cash wages—a first for most black people—allowed for middle-class lifestyles for some and elevated others to elite status. Black service workers were sometimes able to save money and buy property of their own. A government employee's income allowed Frederick Douglass to leave his urban brick rowhouse and move to Cedar Hill, an estate in nearby Anacostia. Even as she railed against segregated schools, Mary Ann Shadd Cary served as the principal at the

American Missionary Association's Lincoln School—a position that placed her among the 3 percent of Washington's black workers who held a professional job. These political and social developments mirrored a phenomenon unfolding across the nation. In staggering numbers, African Americans left the countryside, relocating to urban areas where some made economic progress and began participating in local politics. They headed for Detroit and Cincinnati, for New York, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. Black communities flourished in Baltimore, Maryland; Charleston, South Carolina; Galveston, Texas; Jacksonville, Florida; and Richmond, Virginia.

Many cities had enough black residents to support a black press. Ambitious—if sometimes short-lived—black newspapers proliferated. Across the river from Washington, DC, Alexandria, Virginia, had the *People's Advocate*. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, boasted the *National Progress*. At the end of the 1870s, in Evansville, Indiana, Edwin Horn was publishing *Our Age*. All of these publications kept their eyes on Washington, where they began noticing a troubling development: the waning of federal protection for African Americans. In succeeding decades, Washington remained an important destination for many black Americans, but the experience of these later arrivals differed markedly from that of Reconstruction-era black Washingtonians.



THE END OF RECONSTRUCTION

Radical Reconstruction brought important gains to black southerners: schools, varied economic possibilities, and the franchise. Efforts to diversify the economy and increase access to the polls, leadership experience, and the reuniting of many families separated by slavery also improved black lives. In 1867, in New Orleans, African Americans won the right to ride the public trolley cars. Through protests and negotiations, they persuaded the car companies to admit “our citizens into all the cars, without any distinction as to color.” In many southern states, Radical Republican governments passed laws granting black people access to soda fountains, opera houses, railroads, and steamboats. In 1875, Congress sought to certify these gains with a Civil Rights Act banning discrimination in public places throughout the country. But the act constituted the last piece of civil rights legislation to make its way through Congress until 1957.

Waning Federal Sympathy

Even as civil rights legislation was passed, many reformers pulled back from the enormous effort required to remake a

former slave society. The same 1870 elections that brought black congressmen to power also swept away the Republican majority in the House of Representatives. With the crumbling of Republican power in the early 1870s, African American progress began to disintegrate as well. In the South, from which federal troops were gradually withdrawn, black political organizations withered away. In 1869, Mississippi had 87,000 registered black voters; eleven years later, it had just half that number. Southern Radical Republican governments in southern states gave way to conservative white Democratic ones. White southerners called these developments “redemption.” A black Louisianan saw it differently in 1877: “The whole South—every state in the South—had got into the hands of the very men that held us slaves.”

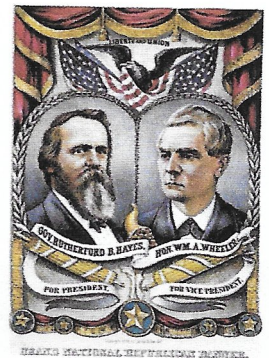
“The whole South—every state in the South—had got into the hands of the very men that held us slaves.”—*Black Louisianan*

The Supreme Court joined the retreat from black causes by limiting the scope of the Fourteenth Amendment. In the *Slaughterhouse Cases* (1873), the Court drew a distinction between citizenship of the United States and citizenship of a state. It asserted that the amendment applied *only to the former; states had the right to define citizenship* and its accompanying rights for their residents. In 1883, the Supreme Court heard several cases in the course of which it voted to overturn the 1875 Civil Rights Act. In making their decisions, the justices distinguished between political rights—guaranteed by the Constitution—and social rights—pertaining to segregation in public places, for example—which it felt involved citizens’ private lives. The Court declared the federal government had no authority over social rights. The stage was now set for the so-called Jim Crow laws, which limited the rights of African Americans for the next seventy-five years.

The Compromise of 1877

The 1876 presidential contest gave Republicans in Congress a final small victory. In an election so close that it fell to the House of Representatives to adjudicate disputed electoral votes, Republicans and Democrats worked out an agreement that became known as the Compromise of 1877.

In the Compromise, southern congressmen agreed to concede the presidency to Republican can-





First Person

Simon Smith Laments the End of Hope

With the 1876 presidential election, black southerners saw their political power evaporate. Returning home to Columbia, South Carolina, Simon P. Smith, a recent graduate of Howard University, wrote to a northern friend.

I visited the state senate and house and the Democrats were very jubilant; but Republicans were in despondency. I talked with two colored representatives . . . and two colored senators. . . . They are all without hope. They all think that the colored man is done in this state. Colored men who had influence here once have no more today than I

have. The Rebels are making colored men do common work for \$.25 per day. How can they live! Labor is worth nothing and provision higher than anywhere else. I know not what our people will do here now.
—from *American Missionary Association Archives*.

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didate Rutherford B. Hayes, while Republicans agreed to make concessions to white southerners, allowing them to control local elections and to make local ordinances controlling such issues as black employment contracts and racial separation. The few remaining federal troops were withdrawn from the South, federal intervention in southern state affairs ceased, and the U.S. government agreed to appoint at least one southerner to the president's cabinet. Across the South, state governments now lay firmly in the hands of the white "redeemers," who regained local power to deny true citizenship privileges—such as the vote—to thousands of African Americans. The national Republican Party distanced itself from black interests, establishing segregated "Black and Tan" parties in an increasingly segregated South. For white Americans, the era of Reconstruction had ended.



AFRICAN AMERICANS ON THE MOVE

"I made the outside box [for Julia Haven] and her coffin, in Smith County, Tennessee. And another young colored lady . . . they committed an outrage on her and then shot her, and I helped to make her coffin." In the spring of 1880, seventy-year-old Benjamin "Pap" Singleton used these two examples of women who had been raped and killed to help a Senate committee understand why black people were fleeing the South. The investigation had been launched in response to claims by both Democrats and Republicans that the opposing political party was conspiring to provoke black people to leave

the South. Republicans accused Democrats of wanting to gain control of the South by expelling black voters; Democrats insisted that Republicans sought to spread their influence outside the South. Singleton knew better: Black people were fleeing the South to avoid rape, murder, and mutilation.

Ho for Kansas!

Brethren, Friends, & Fellow Citizens:

I feel thankful to inform you that the

REAL ESTATE

AND

Homestead Association,

Will Leave Here the

15th of April, 1878,

In pursuit of Homes in the Southwestern
Lands of America, at Transportation

Rates, cheaper than ever
was known before.

For full information inquire of

Benj. Singleton, better known as old Pap,
NO. 5 NORTH FRONT STREET.

Beware of Speculators and Adventurers, as it is a dangerous thing
to fall in their hands.

Nashville, Tenn., March 18, 1878.

One of the many posters calling on southern blacks to leave for Kansas.

- Recruiters for the new black settlements took posters such as this one to local meetings across both North and South.

The Exodusters

Benjamin Singleton, a former Tennessee slave who had escaped via the Underground Railroad through Detroit into Canada, returned to his home state after the war. Like many black Americans, Singleton soon took advantage of the 1862 Homestead Act, which offered 160 acres of government land free to anyone who would live on the property, improve it, and pay a small registration fee. With other black Tennesseans, he started the Edgfield Real Estate and Homestead Association to establish a new black settlement in Kansas. Several families who had visited Kansas, he said, "brought back favorable reports. . . . Three or four hundred . . . went into Southern Kansas . . . and formed a colony there, and bought about a thousand acres of ground." Comparing their projects to the exodus of the biblical Hebrews from Egyptian bondage, the thousands of black Americans who went west with groups such as the Kansas Exodus Joint Stock Company in the late 1870s called themselves *Exodusters*.

The town of Nicodemus in Graham County, Kansas, on the Solomon River typifies these new African American frontier communities. By 1880, 700 black settlers had emigrated to Nicodemus, but many emigrants encountered stiff resistance even as they left home. To retain the South's cheap labor force, white southerners tried to sabotage the planned black exodus. Singleton told Congress how armed white men, positioned along the shore, blocked the Mississippi River to black travelers. They sometimes grabbed the would-be pioneers and hacked off their hands. "Now see if you can go to Kansas and work," they said. White sheriffs arrested black travelers for breach of contract (if they were contracted to a planter) or for vagrancy (if they were not). Despite these tactics, black people continued to head west. Between 1870 and 1880, the African American population in Kansas doubled to more than 40,000.

At first white Kansans welcomed the Exodusters. Eager to increase the population of farmers and defend themselves from Native Americans who resisted the white influx, some

"We don't want to leave the South, and just as soon as we have confidence in the South I am going to persuade every man to go back."—*Benjamin Singleton*

Kansas communities raised money to help black newcomers pay land fees. But many black homesteaders, with few tools or work animals, found independent farming tough going. Discouraged, many Exodusters ended up in Topeka, where

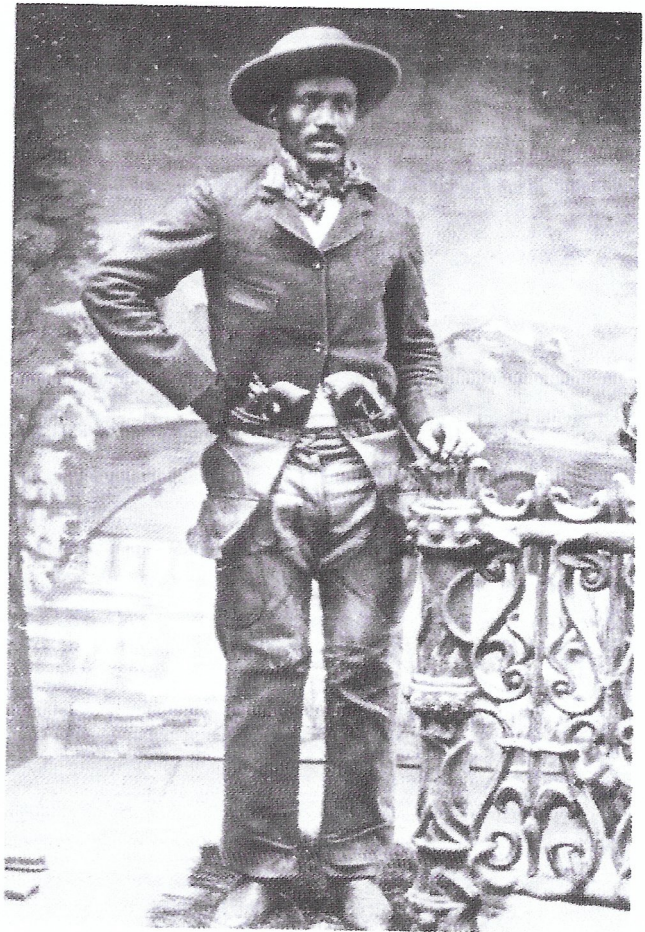
they hunted for work. But this city was also home to displaced white southerners also looking for employment. Racial intimidation and lynchings became so common that the Republican mayor of Topeka, once sympathetic to African Americans, suggested the money raised for black relief might

better go to returning black refugees to the South—especially agitators "who were always talking politics."

Some black leaders like Frederick Douglass urged black families to stay in the South. Only with large numbers, they contended, could black voters exert power and influence. But Douglass wrote from the relative safety and comfort of Washington. It was people like Singleton who experienced the southern predicament firsthand: "We don't want to leave the South," he wrote in 1881, "and just as soon as we have confidence in the South I am going to . . . persuade every man to go back, because that is the best country; . . . we love that country . . . but [by leaving] we are going to learn the South a lesson."

The Western Frontier

Beyond Kansas, numerous African Americans found adventure and fortune in Nebraska, Colorado, North Dakota, and along the Pacific coast. Closed out of northern and southern



■ Finishing a term as a forager (raider) for the Confederate army, Isom Dart was among the cowboys who drifted west. Joining a group of cattle thieves, he was arrested in Texas, Colorado, and Wyoming. Legend has it that he was never imprisoned.



First Person

John E. Bruce Promotes Africa

Black journalist John E. Bruce was among those who envisioned Africa as a "homeland." Before a Philadelphia audience in 1877, he argued that Africa offered black Americans freedom from racial prejudice.

I shall endeavor to show tonight why the colored American should emigrate to Africa. First, because Africa is his fatherland; secondly, because before the war, in the South he was a slave, and in the North, a victim of prejudice and ostracism; and thirdly, because, since the close of the war, although he has been freed by emancipation and invested with enfranchisement, he is only nominally free; and lastly, because he is still a victim of prejudice, and practically proscribed socially, religiously, politically, educationally, and in the various industrial pursuits.

... The colored American should emigrate to Africa ... because he ... cannot enter a hotel and obtain accommodations without paying a double price, should he be successful in entering at all. If he go to the church of God in this Christian land, he is thrust into the gallery.

... Africa is a country rich in its productions, offering untold treasures to the adventurer who would go there. It has a peculiar claim upon the colored American.

—*excerpted from the Christian Recorder, November 1, 1877.*

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economy and politics, many black families headed for these new frontiers. Nancy Lewis told how she and her husband, a Civil War veteran, established their Nebraska farm in the 1870s. By 1880, they counted among 2,000 black Nebraskans. Virginia-born Barney Ford, a one-time barber and ship's steward, journeyed to Denver and by 1874 had opened a prosperous hotel. Two of Frederick Douglass's sons were also among Denver's thousand African Americans. Colorful cowboy Nat Love was among several hundred African Americans in North Dakota. His prowess in an 1876 rodeo in Deadwood City gained him the nickname "Deadwood Dick." Love's autobiography, *The Life & Adventures of Nat Love, Better Known in the Cattle Country As Deadwood Dick* (1876), promoted the escapades of black cowboys. But when the book was later published as one of many mass-market stories of the West, mention of Love's African heritage was omitted.

Some black Americans got as far west as California. By 1880, as many as 6,000 reached the coastal state. Several hundred settled in each of the other western states and territories. These pioneers included cowboys, shopkeepers, prospectors, service workers such as barbers, laundresses, and domestic servants, and farmers. A few, like Biddy Mason, found California a rewarding home. Dragged across the Rocky Mountains in the 1850s when her Mormon owner joined the gold rush, Mason remained in California after the courts declared her free. Purchasing property, she ran a successful boarding-

house and grocery store, donated some of her profits to black schools, and helped establish the West's first AME church.

To Africa

Driven by the same hope and frustration that motivated western migration, other black Americans looked east to Africa. In the postwar years, Martin Delany revived his dream of claiming a black nationality there. "We have no chance to rise from beggars," Delany argued. "Men own the capital that we work who believe that my race have no more right to any of the profits of their labor than one of their mules." Richard Cain, a disillusioned ex-congressman, echoed Delany's despair: "There are thousands who are willing and ready to leave South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, and North Carolina. ... The colored people of the South are tired of the constant struggle for life and liberty and prefer going where [there are] no obstacles . . . to . . . their liberty." Partnering with AME minister Henry McNeal Turner, Delany recruited settlers for Liberia. Turner had been born free in South Carolina in 1834, studied in the North, and served as pastor for a Washington, DC, church before the Civil War. After a stint as an army chaplain, he stayed in Georgia, working for the Republican Party and the AME church. By 1877, he shared Delany's dismay at the federal government's abandonment of black southerners.

In the spring of 1878, thousands of black Americans watched the launching of the *Azor* from Charleston's wharf.

Led by Delany and Turner, and with support from Cain, the Liberian Exodus Joint Stock Company had raised more than \$6,000 to purchase the ship, which now carried roughly 200 settlers to Africa. Other black families invested thousands more. But expenses exceeded the company's limited capital, and the Exodus company soon lay in financial shambles. After delivering its first settlers, the company collapsed without establishing a permanent community. Though the Liberian Exodus Company represented yet another failed dream, the image of an African homecoming remained in the black imagination. Future generations would try again.

CONCLUSION

Emanuel Fortune's testimony in 1871 before the congressional committee investigating the Ku Klux Klan revealed the violence underlying post-Civil War southern politics. The politics of this war-torn region was no longer merely a regional concern of southerners and a few abolitionist northerners. The challenges facing African Americans now dominated the national agenda.

The federal government had outlawed slavery, extended equal rights to all citizens, and mandated that all black men could vote, but the law had little to do with reality. Though Hiram Revels and other black men represented southern states in Congress, white supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan used threats, torture, and murder to scare southern black would-be voters away from the polls. Still, many black politicians sought common ground to negotiate compromises with southern white politicians. Sometimes they urged their black followers to accommodate some aspect of racial oppression in return for economic gains or political representation. At the far margin of the political spectrum, radicals tried to bridge the gap between the wealthy and the disaffected. They offered hope of a society that transcended divisions of race and class. All these strategies aimed to enable black people to move toward economic and social equality.

By 1877, African Americans seemed destined to be shunted aside again. With the Compromise of 1877, the federal government completed its withdrawal from helping freed slaves gain political rights and economic security. In the post-war era, black politicians had gained seats in Congress and in state legislatures. But with the end of Reconstruction, black politicians began leaving Washington and returning to the South to manage their personal lives and fortunes and to try to forge working relationships with white neighbors. Most white people in the North and the South expected black Americans to stay in the South, resigning themselves to menial jobs, limited political power, and continued deference to white

people. Indeed, in the coming decades, southern black laborers seemed doomed to jobs that ensured only subordination and debt, and black leaders understood these as the limitations within which they must operate.

Though Washington, DC, the federal capital, continued to attract black people seeking jobs and a strong black community, the American frontier and Africa lured others who dreamed of better opportunities and fresh ideas. By 1879, with the passing of many antebellum black leaders, the black cause desperately needed new energy and direction. The ratification of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments had promised African Americans access to political participation. Now, with Black Codes, poverty, and violence circumscribing those promises, black Americans needed new leaders.

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African American Lives

The Struggle for Freedom

Volume I

Clayborne Carson
Stanford University

Emma J. Lapsansky-Werner
Haverford College

Gary B. Nash
University of California, Los Angeles



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