



African American Congressmen Lesson

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UNITED STATES HISTORY STANDARDS:

Era 5 – Civil War and Reconstruction (1850-1877)

- Standard 3A: The student understands the political controversy over Reconstruction.
- Standard 3B: The student understands the Reconstruction programs to transform social relations in the South.
- Standard 3C: The student understands the successes and failures of Reconstruction in the South, North and West.

LESSON:

As a class, study how the end of slavery and the voting rights of African Americans changed the representation in the South within the United States Congress and Southern state legislatures. Amendments and laws to study include: the 14th Amendment, the 15th Amendment, the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and the Reconstruction Act of 1866.

- Why were these laws passed?
- What was the attitude of Southern whites towards these laws?
- What was the attitude of Southern African Americans towards these laws?
- What was the effect of the laws on African Americans?
- How did the laws alter who was allowed to hold office?
- How did the laws alter who was able to win congressional offices?

Have students choose an African American politician who served in the United States Congress or a Southern state legislature during Reconstruction.

Examples from the United States Congress:

- Hiram Rhodes Revels, Senator from Mississippi
- Blanche Bruce, Senator from Mississippi
- John Willis Menard, Representative from Louisiana
- Joseph Rainey, Representative from South Carolina
- Jefferson F. Long, Representative from Georgia
- Robert C. DeLarge, Representative from South Carolina
- Robert B. Elliott, Representative from South Carolina
- Benjamin S. Turner, Representative from Alabama
- Josiah T. Walls, Representative from Florida
- Richard H. Cain, Representative from South Carolina
- John R. Lynch, Representative from Mississippi
- James T. Rapier, Representative from Alabama
- Alonzo J. Ransier, Representative from South Carolina
- Jeremiah Haralson, Representative from Alabama
- John Adams Hyman, Representative from North Carolina

- Charles E. Nash, Representative from Louisiana
- Robert Smalls, Representative from South Carolina
- James E. O'Hara, Representative from North Carolina
- Henry P. Cheatham, Representative from North Carolina
- John Mercer Langston, Representative from Virginia
- Thomas E. Miller, Representative from South Carolina
- George W. Murray, Representative from South Carolina
- George Henry White, Representative from North Carolina

Have students research their subject within historical documents and histories. They should start their research within county histories, biographies, and online sources to gather enough information about each man to locate them within the historical documents. Then search for the men in historical documents, including: census records including the 1850 and 1860 slave schedules, birth records, marriage records including U.S. Freedmen Marriage Records, 1861-1869, death records, military records, immigration records, city directories, U.S. Colored Troops Military Service Records, 1861-1865, U.S. Freedman Bank Records, 1865-1874, and historical newspapers.

Individual students or groups should present what they have learned about the men they studied. Questions to aid the presentation include:

- Describe the man's life before slavery.
- What skills learned before the end of slavery aided the man's ability to become a congressman?
- What were then man's accomplishments during their time in office?
- Why did the congressman leave office?
- What happened to the man after he left office?

As a class, discuss how voting restrictions, within the Compromise of 1877 and Jim Crow laws were put into place to keep blacks from voting and to keep them out of elected positions.

- What was the main reason for the Compromise of 1877?
- What was the opinion of Southern whites towards the Compromise of 1877?
- What was the opinion of Southern African Americans towards the Compromise of 1877?
- Why were some African Americans able to remain representatives after the Compromise of 1877?
- What were the lasting effects on African Americans from the Compromise of 1877 and Jim Crow laws?