

the Legislatures are only what might have been expected. Your Indiana Democrat is everywhere Copperhead. In none else of the Northern or Western States does the breed so distinctly retain its characteristics. We cannot be surprised, therefore, that a proposition to throw around citizenship the guarantee of equality has aroused in that State the furious hostility which has displayed itself at Indianapolis. So far as the Democrats there are concerned, the nullifying platform of the Fourth of July Convention is still the supreme law. They will not recognize reconstruction, its agencies or results. They will have no settlement which implies the manhood and citizenship of the negro. They parade the worn-out dogma, "This is a white man's Government," as though it were a divine command, and with a stolid fanaticism which shows the necessity of placing above the influence of partisan accidents the equitable solution of the suffrage problem.

Governor STEVENSON, of Kentucky, in a message counseling a refusal to ratify the amendment, indulges the passion for exaggeration and untruth which seems the usual groundwork of Democratic zeal. He treats the amendment as revolutionary, and its submission by Congress as proof positive of usurpation. "It ignores the relations" of the Federal Government to the Governments of the States. "It obliterates and destroys" "the reserved rights of the States." "Its purpose," forsooth, "is to annihilate the State Governments." In this style, the irate Kentuckian proceeds to incite the local legislators to resist the atrocious scheme. He makes no mention of the changes which have happened during the last few years. He writes as though no rebellion had occurred, and as though slavery were still in full blast. He forgets—if, indeed, he ever knew—that the war has determined some things, including the standing of the freedman and his possession of political power in States whose exploded theory of government Kentucky still cherishes.

All this vehement protestation against Federal "usurpation" is arrant nonsense. Had Congress adopted the pretension urged by some in its behalf, respecting the right by an ordinary enactment to force universal suffrage upon all the States, this message of Governor STEVENSON might have been in order. There would then have been good ground for attributing to the Federal authority a disregard of local rights as defined by the Constitution. But it is folly to talk of "revolution," or "oppression" or "usurped authority" when, as in this case, Congress has done no more than initiate, in the manner prescribed by the Constitution, a measure which depends for its efficacy upon the States themselves. We presume that Kentucky does not deny the lawfulness of a constitutional change if the requisite number of States give it their sanction. And if these States, through their Legislatures, declare their approval of the Fifteenth Amendment, wherein is the Constitution violated, or the reserved power of the States "obliterated and destroyed?" Instead of invading States' rights, Congress has in this matter recognized them, and the amendment, if ratified, will derive its force from that very consent which Governor STEVENSON describes as "ignored" and "annihilated."

The amendment, as submitted to the country, embodies the idea of moderation and compromise. The presentation of the suffrage question in this shape is a triumph over the ultra opinions which in the first instance would have made Congress absolute, and in the next would have enforced universal as distinguished from impartial suffrage. It is a triumph of constitutional reform over that tendency to usurpation which at one period threatened to be dangerous. And it substantially leaves the suffrage subject to the individual action of States. They may enact qualifications of education or property, precisely as at present, and will thus hold the power of regulating the franchise as to themselves may seem best. The only thing which the amendment will debar them from doing is, the setting up of a distinction founded upon color or former servitude. Whatever tests are to be applied must affect white and black alike, as indeed they ought to, if their purpose be to exclude ignorance or thriftlessness from the exercise of the franchise. The old test of color is a relic of the prejudice which the Democrats of Indiana and Kentucky stupidly mistake for principle.

The Opposition to the Fifteenth Amendment.

The extremists of both parties in Georgia oppose the ratification of the pending constitutional amendment for reasons which prove its expediency and justice. The violent Democrats assail it because it permanently removes from the partisan arena the essential element of the suffrage question. They would have the whole question remain under the control of the States in the hope that the fundamental condition of reconstruction may be some day abrogated. The violent Radicals, on the other hand, for the time forgetting WENDELL PHILLIPS' prudential whispers, object that the amendment substitutes impartial for universal enfranchisement, and omits an affirmation of the colored man's right to office. The two extremes, then, meet at the point of opposition. They do not want the question disposed of. They prefer that it shall be kept open, if possible, that they may respectively appeal to the ignorance and prejudices of their adherents. The fact that two bodies of partisans, differing so widely in their ultimate purposes, are anxious to prevent the adoption of the amendment, seems to us the best possible argument in its favor. Certainly, an alliance so unnatural and unprincipled justifies the hope that, even in Georgia, the moderate and practical men of either party will be found supporting a measure which simply recognizes a leading result of the war, and terminates an irritating controversy in a manner which guarantees an equality of political rights without forcing upon the States universal suffrage.

The ground of opposition assumed by the Indiana Democracy shows how obstinately the party clings to its traditions. The disorganizing tactics of the Democrats in

The Colored Vote.

It is estimated that the Fifteenth Amendment has put the ballot into the hands of at least 800,000 blacks in all the States, of whom about 700,000 reside at the South. The popular majority for Gen. GRANT in 1868 was nearly 310,000, or considerably less than one-half the new negro vote. It is safe, therefore, to conclude that if this vote should ever be cast solid, it would decide the result of general elections for many years to come, and that in most of the State elections the negro will hold the balance of political power. As might have been expected, this fact has set partisan managers to work calculating the chances of the future, and has caused Democratic leaders to exercise their wits in devising plans to divide the colored vote.

They find the task a very discouraging one, chiefly on account of their record of antagonism to the negro. No class is better aware of this antagonism than the negro himself, for he has been made to feel it in the most forcible manner. Without entering into any discussion of the standard of intelligence of the black race—which used to be a far more favorite topic with Democrats than it is now—it is sufficient to say that the negro has ample capacity for rendering a correct judgment, based upon an unhappy experience, as to who really proved his friends in a critical emergency. It does not require a very keen perception to correctly interpret the New-York and New-Orleans riots, or the eager withdrawal of the ratification by the State of New-York of the Fifteenth Amendment last Winter; neither is it difficult to discover the unpleasant antagonism which exists in the minds of the Democratic Irish element toward the negro. If it be said that these are mere local demonstrations, chiefly confined to the North, and that the true friend of the negro is to be found in the Southern States, where he belongs, an equally conclusive answer suggests itself. The negro can point to the institution of slavery, and recall his own bitter experience; he can cite the fact that a great war was waged by the North, and the Republican Party, to abolish slavery—he can point to the graves of a quarter of million of whites, and the cheerful incurring of a great load of debt and taxation—as substantial evidences of the sincere and practical friendship of the Republican Party.

Such demonstrations as these are easily understood; and they are far more effective toward conviction than all the protestations which can be made. But even they are but a small part of the evidence which addresses itself to the gratitude of the freedmen. Ever since the war closed, the political record has been a steady proof that the Republicans were their disinterested friends. Their present political privileges have been secured by dint of unremitting effort, in opposition to the Democratic Party. The campaign of 1868 was fought almost exclusively on that issue. Had the result been different, the Fifteenth Amendment would have been defeated, and all the preliminary conditions which had been insisted on would have been stultified. We do not allude to these things in any boastful spirit, or with a view of unduly asserting the claim of the Republican Party to the gratitude of the black race. We believe that the party acted upon a broad principle, and not from any selfish motives. It is necessary, however, to show how utterly futile any Democratic effort to divide the negro vote must be, so long as it adheres to its ancient policy.

The Southern people only deceive themselves, while trying to deceive the negro into the belief that his true friends are to be found outside the Republican Party. The truth is that not one in a hundred of the fifteen thousand blacks in this State will vote the Democratic ticket today. A still smaller proportion of the freedmen at the South will vote with that party, so long as it maintains its present policy. In order to find favor with them the party must abandon its old heresies, and virtually embrace Republican principles as affecting the negro race. Of course it would be far better for the negro if this could be done, for it would withdraw him from politics as a disturbing element. So desirable a consummation cannot be looked for at present. The negro must, in the meantime, act steadily with the party which brought him up out of the "slough of despond."

from 1909: the first historical analysis of the 15th Amendment

Result 6 of 100 in this book for **JOhn Mabry Mathews** - [◀ Previous](#) [Next ▶](#) - [View all](#)

EBOOK - FREE

Get this book in print ▼



G+



0 Reviews

[Write review](#)

Legislative and Judicial History of the Fifteenth Amendment

By John Mabry Mathews

JOhn Mabry Mathews

Go

[About this book](#)

▶ [My library](#)

▶ [My History](#)

[Books on Google Play](#)

[Terms of Service](#)

The bearing of the Amendment upon Chinese suffrage produced an imbroglio between the politicians, the humanitarians, and the local autonomists. From the standpoint of the politicians, the introduction of the Chinese issue was an entirely uncalled for complication. But the humanitarians could not consistently withdraw from their position merely because it involved the possible extension of suffrage to a few thousand Chinamen on the Pacific Coast. When, said Senator Trumbull of Illinois, we attempt to amend the Constitution so as to carry out the great principle of human rights, it seems very inconsistent “to declare that the Hottentots and cannibals from Africa shall have the right to vote” and at the same time to exclude the citizens of the oldest empire on earth.¹⁹

The local autonomists deprecated the imposition of the Chinese vote upon the people of the Pacific Coast without their consent on the ground that the latter were the best judges of their own local conditions and needs.²⁰ The senators from the Pacific Coast States were broad humanitarians as far as the negro was concerned, but, in the language of the New York Herald, “when all at once the

Chinaman loomed up, they discovered a shade of color and a peculiarity of race they had hitherto entirely overlooked."²¹ They declared that to deprive the Pacific Coast States of the power to withhold suffrage from Chinese would hand over that section of the country to political degradation and moral pollution.²² As their votes, however, were not necessary to carry the Amendment through, no concession was made to them.

THE RIGHT TO VOTE: POLITICS AND THE PASSAGE OF THE FIFTEENTH AMENDMENT. By *William Gillette*. [The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, Series LXXXIII (1965), Number 1.] (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press. 1965. Pp. 181. \$4.50.)

THOUGH the Fifteenth Amendment became part of the Constitution in 1870, it was not until 1909 that the first scholarly study of it appeared: John Mabry Mathews' *Legislative and Judicial History of the Fifteenth Amendment*, which remained, until Professor Gillette's book, the only work on the subject. According to Mathews the primary objective of the Fifteenth Amendment was to guarantee Negro suffrage in the South by law, and this became the accepted view of the amendment.

Gillette revises this view. His thesis is that the main objective of the Fifteenth Amendment was to enfranchise the northern Negro and not to keep Negro suffrage in the South, which was a secondary objective. The Republicans wanted, and needed, Negro voters to keep the North Republican, and during the nineteenth century the practical effect of the amendment was to bring the ballot to the northern Negro and power to the Republicans.

Gillette also contends that the Fifteenth Amendment was not radical in design, intent, or result. Rather it was a moderate and modest measure "framed, championed, and secured by generally Republican moderates." It offered too little to southern Republicans, who wanted greater protection of Negro voting and a mild guarantee of Negro officeholding. It offered even less to the veteran antislavery northern Republicans who sought, in addition to firmer guarantees for southern Negroes, general suffrage reform and even national control of suffrage. On the other hand, for Democrats who feared the Republican Negro vote both in the North and the South and disliked federal interference in state and local elections the amendment was too strong, as it was for restrictionist Republicans from the Pacific and Atlantic seaboard, who worried about Chinese or Irish voters. Though the ratification fight on the amendment took only thirteen months, it was hard and the outcome uncertain.



Fighting Chance: The Struggle over Woman Suffrage and Black Suffrage in Reconstruction America

By Faye E. Dudden

7

The Fight over the Fifteenth Amendment

It was an obvious slap in the face. With Wendell Phillips's encouragement, the Boston woman suffragists had called a convention in late November 1868, shortly after Ulysses S. Grant was elected president. It was bad enough that the organizers failed to invite Susan B. Anthony. But when they first invited Elizabeth Cady Stanton to speak and then *withdrew* the invitation claiming it had been issued "by mistake," Stanton was furious.¹ She retaliated by publicizing the maladroit episode in the *Revolution*. The Boston women had called "a little private convention of their own," she wrote, to which she had been finally invited despite fears that doing so "would be endorsing Seymour, Blair, Tammany, the *New York World*, and the *Revolution*." "We accepted the invitation," she wrote, "and began to plan the threads of our discourse, and the fitting bonnet, cloak and dress (for these innocent vanities will creep into the souls of the most strong minded)." But then, she concluded in mock-heroic tones, "Lo! Like the milkmaid in the fable, our visions of glory were all suddenly dashed to the ground; for in an evil moment the committee repented themselves, and we were duly informed that the invitation was withdrawn!"² By mentioning Blair, Stanton betrayed some awareness that she might be subject to legitimate criticism, but she was not about to accept it from the stay-at-home Bostonians who had not lifted a finger to help in Kansas and lacked the courage to face her in debate. Stanton was already disturbed by the news that, by all accounts, the Republicans would shortly pass a constitutional amendment securing the right to vote for black men but not for women. The Bostonians who presumed to rescue the women's movement from her tainted leadership made the political outlook even harder to face.

Feeling sure the Fifteenth Amendment was in hand, Wendell Phillips declared a "woman's hour" in late 1868. For a moment it seemed that Stanton and Anthony might yet see woman suffrage become a reality in Washington, D.C. But when the Fifteenth Amendment slowed and stalled in Congress, Phillips reversed himself again and reannounced the "Negro's hour." This time he had the help of Lucy Stone, who finally arrived at a position of open

opposition, even enmity to Anthony especially. Stanton reacted to this latest disappointment by making her “fearful outrages” claim, taking on the race hatred of Blair and the *World* and making it her own, and Anthony backed her up. By January or February 1869 there was no longer any chance, fighting or otherwise, to win woman suffrage. According to the “claim the uttermost and you are sure to get something” adage, it was time for these woman suffrage leaders to concede that the “something” they would have to settle for was black (male) suffrage. But they could not bring themselves to do it until late summer or fall 1869, and in the interim, they engaged in ugly sniping and irresponsible vituperation. They no longer had a fighting chance, but they were worn out with failure and poorer for their efforts. They were also embittered by personal attacks from rival white activists, thrown into confrontational situations because of free platform traditions, chafed by a long ratification fight, and stung by the humiliating realization that women were to be the only sensible adults without the ballot. Conflict came to a head at the 1869 AERA convention, where Stanton and Anthony clashed with Frederick Douglass and Frances Harper. Douglass and Harper kept the focus on the issues and eschewed personal attacks, but the AERA was shattered. The “saddest of all divorces” had finally come.

After Grant’s election, Republicans finally determined on a Fifteenth Amendment to guarantee black (male) suffrage because they saw that Grant’s margin of victory was alarmingly slim—only about 300,000 in an election in which 500,000 black men cast votes.³ Under these circumstances, even unprincipled party hacks saw the merits of an amendment that would protect black Republicans already enfranchised in the South and add additional black Republican voters in the northern and border states. The opportunity stood open because they could take advantage of their super majority in the lame duck congressional session in the winter of 1868–69 to pass the amendment. Furthermore, because ratification took place inside state legislatures, they could keep what might be an unpopular measure buffered from the voters.⁴ Thus voting rights for black men, long the goal of radicals, finally appealed to moderate and conservative Republicans as a means to secure the party’s hold on power.⁵

Wendell Phillips eagerly embraced these developments. By interpreting the Fifteenth Amendment as “the last and most necessary of all the abolitionists’ victories,” he could “adjust emotionally” to the defeat he had suffered in his previous struggle to influence the Republican Party. Feeling vindicated after all, he urged Congress to lose no time on “needless debate” or mere “phraseology.”⁶ And now that he felt confident of the Fifteenth Amendment, Phillips finally lifted his “Negro’s hour” proscription against woman suffrage agitation. He signaled the change in two editorials in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* in the fall of 1868, one in anticipation of the women’s rights convention in Boston, and

one just after it was held.⁷ Boston woman suffragists were ready to act on Phillips's signal by holding their convention in November 1868, and at the same time, in apparent coordination, a number of state woman suffrage conventions were held elsewhere in the Northeast.⁸ At the Boston convention Thomas Wentworth Higginson announced that this was "emphatically the woman's hour," now that "questions that took precedence" had been cleared away.⁹

A group of Bostonians led by Caroline Severance used the convention to launch a New England Woman Suffrage Association (NEWSA). They blackballed quarrelsome Caroline Dall, eased Olympia Brown to the side, and ignored or disinvited the *Revolution* editors.¹⁰ Instead, the New England organization elevated the socially prominent Julia Ward Howe to its top leadership position despite her being a very recent convert. Her chief credentials seemed to be her elite status and her willingness to say plainly, "I am glad we shall come in after the negro."¹¹ The Boston convention defined the woman's hour as a time to build a formal organization; results would come later, after black men had the vote. Frederick Douglass was there to endorse woman suffrage but also to remind the convention that black suffrage was a matter of "much greater emergency... a matter of life and death."¹² Massachusetts senator Henry Wilson told the convention, "For more than a dozen years... I would have given suffrage to the women of Massachusetts," but he also boasted of having "courage enough" to vote down woman suffrage when it had been coupled with black suffrage.¹³ Other prominent attendees willing to echo those priorities included William Lloyd Garrison and Frances E. W. Harper. Wendell Phillips was not present, perhaps because he was avoiding Garrison, but the proceedings clearly had his blessing.¹⁴ In the NEWSA, Boston woman suffragists effectively created a safe-and-sane alternative to Stanton and Anthony, making a clear commitment to backing a black (male) suffrage Fifteenth Amendment and *then* seeking a woman suffrage Sixteenth Amendment. They seemed able to tap widespread grassroots interest via state-level conventions that were held around the Northeast, and they also seemed to have access to all-important funding, because it was announced that \$2,000 had been pledged toward the operation of the new NEWSA.¹⁵