

African american politicians

[History](#), [African American](#)



During the Reconstruction era over two thousand African Americans served in federal, state, and local offices. Information on these individuals is difficult to find, seeing as during this time black lawmakers were condemned as subhuman, and in no need of documentation. Eric Foner, author of *Black Politicians in the Reconstruction Era*, stated that of the two thousand he only found about 1465 for his book. A great deal of the information on these men and the offices they held was obscure and incorrect.

Many scholars had false information about the education level of these African American lawmakers. For example, many scholars claimed that most black delegates to the Georgia convention were illiterate, actually twenty-two of these thirty-seven could read and write. This was impressive seeing as it was against the law in many states for African Americans to be taught how to read or write. The basic research on these politicians was not done because these scholars thought they knew all they needed to know.

These lawmakers were black; many were ex-slaves, so they must have been ignorant, corrupt, and incompetent, this was the stereotype, but it was not so! Many of the African American leaders saw fit to educate themselves. Men like John Roy Lynch, who took time off from his photographer's studio to observe a white classroom from across an alley. He continued this until he had mastered all of the classes taught there. Situations like this show the desire and determination these men had to learn. He used this training to become speaker of the Mississippi house and later a member of congress.

These are only two of the many examples of African Americans who self educated themselves in a time when African Americans were banned from

education. Others did have a formal education. In South Carolina, State Treasurer Francis L. Cardozo attended Glasgow and London. He was a minister in New Haven and a principal for the School for Blacks in Charleston. These were better credentials than some white politicians had. Economically black politicians were in no way reaping the monetary rewards that Conservatives and white carpetbaggers enjoyed.

While African Americans status impressive compared to other freedmen, most could not translate political power into a share of the economic growth of their states. Even prominent leaders such as Hiram Revels, who was the first the first black man to serve in the United States Senate sometimes found it necessary to take small loans from white politicians to meet every day expense. The reconstruction era was a difficult time for African American politicians. In a time when negative stereotypes where all too common, and the color of your skin determined your level of intelligence in the eyes of many.

Black leaders had to work twice as hard to accomplish half as much. An extremely relevant point, and a credit to the African American politicians was the fact that there was a very small amount of vindictiveness in their actions and words. They had nodreamsor desires to take advantage, or become greedy with the power they were beginning to acquire. They seemed more fixated on receiving what they thought they were entitled to. Beverly Nash, a member of the South Carolina convention, asserted in his first speech, " the white man is a true friend of the black man.

He went on to say, " I you could see the scroll of the society that banner represents, you would see the white man and the black man standing with their arms locked together, as the type offriendshipwe desire. " Even when some leaders such as Henry McNeal Turner, who was almost universally disliked by whites, still did what he could to assist in helping the white economy recover its economic strength. Even after all that was done to them, the black leaders held no resentment, and worked for the benefites of blacks and whites as a whole.

In conclusion, there are many misconceptions about African American leaders during the era of reconstruction. From their level of education, to the positions they held, and the lifestyles they lead. Black leaders were equally, if not more qualified than their white counter parts for political positions. Unfortunately they were not being compensated in the same manner as the white politicians.