

James garfield: black suffrage essay sample



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Following the Civil War, Radical Republicans in Congress introduced a series of laws and constitutional amendments to try to secure civil and political rights for black people. This wing of the Republican Party was called “radical” because of its strong stance on these and other issues. The right that provoked the greatest controversy, especially in the North, concerned black male suffrage. Black Suffrage was a revolutionary impact for equality among African Americans in the United States.

Even though African American men began voting in the South after 1867, the majority of Northern states continued to deny them this basic right. In the North, Radical Republican leaders feared that they might lose control of congress to the Democrats once African Americans started voting. One solution to this problem called for including the black man’s vote in all Northern states. Republicans assumed the new black voters would vote Republican just as their brothers were doing in the South. By increasing its voters in the North and South, the Republican Party could then maintain its stronghold in Congress. However, the Republican party faced an incredible dilemma. The idea of blacks voting was not popular in the North. In fact, some Republicans had voted against black male suffrage.

The Republicans agreed that African-American male suffrage continued to be a requirement for the Southern states, but decided that the Northern states should settle this issue for themselves. In debates over the amendment, Democrats argued against the ratification by claiming that the 15th Amendment restricted the states’ rights to run their own elections. Republican leaders had it clear that if they wanted to remain in power, their party needed black men vote in the North. When the new year began in

1869, the Republicans were ready to introduce a constitutional amendment guaranteeing the black man's right to vote. Congress considered the newly proposed amendment that guaranteed the black man's right to vote.

After about almost two months, several versions of the amendment were submitted, debated, rejected and then reconsidered in both the House and Senate. Once the amendment was approved by the required two-thirds majorities in the House and the Senate, it had to be ratified by three-fourths of the states. Democrats realized they were fighting for political survival. They feared that ratification of the 15th Amendment would automatically create some 170, 000 loyal black Republican voters in the North and West. They argued against the ratification by claiming that the 15th Amendment restricted the states' rights to run their own elections. They also charged the Republicans with breaking their promise of allowing the states, outside the South, to decide for themselves whether to grant black male suffrage. Democrat leaders cited the low level of literacy in the black population and they predicted black voters would be easily swayed by false promises and outright bribery.