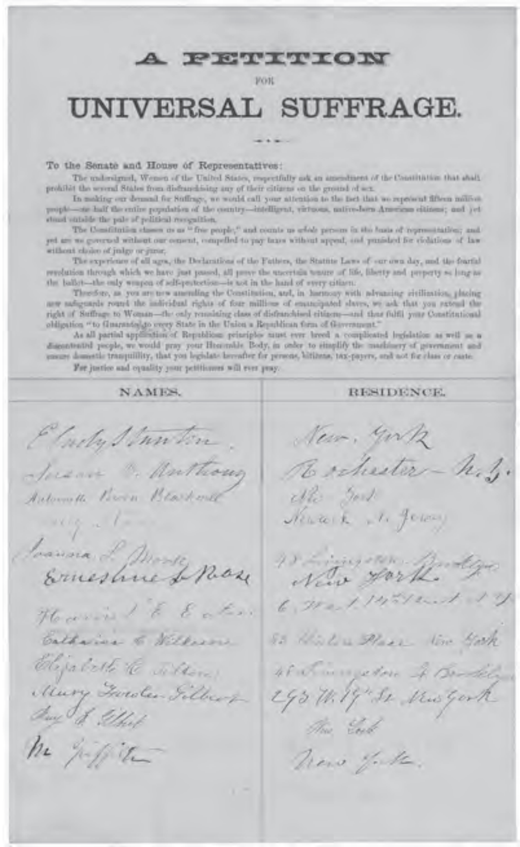
saw an unprecedented opportunity for disenfranchised groups. Women as well as black Americans, North and South, could seize political rights. Stanton formed the Women's Loyal National League in 1863, which petitioned Congress for a constitutional amendment abolishing slavery.[21] The Thirteenth Amendment marked a victory not only for the antislavery cause but also for the Loyal League, proving women's political efficacy and the possibility for radical change. Now, as Congress debated the meanings of freedom, equality, and citizenship for former slaves, women's rights leaders saw an opening to advance transformations in women's status, too. On May 10, 1866, just one year after the war, the Eleventh National Women's Rights Convention met in New York City to discuss what many agreed was an extraordinary moment, full of promise for fundamental social change. Elizabeth Cady Stanton presided over the meeting. Also in attendance were prominent abolitionists with whom Stanton and other women's rights leaders had joined forces in the years leading up to the war. Addressing this crowd of social reformers, Stanton captured the radical spirit of the hour: "now in the reconstruction," she declared, "is the opportunity, perhaps for the century, to base our government on the broad principle of equal rights for all."[22] Stanton chose her universal language—"equal rights *for all*"—with intention, setting an agenda of universal suffrage. Thus, in 1866, the National Women's Rights Convention officially merged with the American Anti-Slavery Society to form the American Equal Rights Association (AERA). This union marked the culmination of the long-standing partnership between abolitionists and women's rights advocates.

The AERA was split over whether black male suffrage should take precedence over universal suffrage, given the political climate of the South. Some worried that political support for freedmen would be undermined by the pursuit of women's suffrage. For example, AERA member Frederick Douglass insisted that the ballot was literally a "question of life and death" for southern black men, but not for women.[23] Some African American women challenged white suffragists in other ways. Frances Harper, for example, a freeborn black woman living in Ohio, urged them to consider their own privilege as white and middle class. Universal suffrage, she argued, would not so clearly address the complex difficulties posed by racial, economic, and gender inequality.[24]

These divisions came to a head early in 1867, as the AERA organized a campaign in Kansas to determine the fate of black and woman suffrage. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and her partner in the movement, Susan B.


A PETITION

FOR

UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE.

To the Senate and House of Representatives:

The undersigned, Women of the United States, respectfully ask an amendment of the Constitution that shall prohibit the several States from disfranchising any of their citizens on the ground of sex.

In making our demand for Suffrage, we would call your attention to the fact that we represent fifteen million people—one half the entire population of the country—intelligent, virtuous, native-born American citizens; and yet stand outside the pale of political recognition.

The Constitution classes us as "free people," and counts us *whole* persons in the basis of representation; and yet are we governed without our consent, compelled to pay taxes without appeal, and punished for violations of law without choice of judge or juror.

The experience of all ages, the Declarations of the Fathers, the Statute Laws of our own day, and the fearful revolution through which we have just passed, all prove the uncertain tenure of life, liberty and property so long as the ballot—the only weapon of self-protection—is not in the hand of every citizen.

Therefore, as you are now amending the Constitution, and, in harmony with advancing civilization, placing new safeguards round the individual rights of four millions of emancipated slaves, we ask that you extend the right of Suffrage to Woman—the only remaining class of disfranchised citizens—and thus fulfil your Constitutional obligation "to Guarantee to every State in the Union a Republican form of Government."

As all partial application of Republican principles must ever breed a complicated legislation as well as a discontented people, we would pray your Honorable Body, in order to simplify the machinery of government and ensure domestic tranquillity, that you legislate hereafter for persons, citizens, tax-payers, and not for class or caste.

For justice and equality your petitioners will ever pray.

NAMES.	RESIDENCE.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the great women's rights and abolition activist, was one of the strongest forces in the universal suffrage movement. Her name can be seen at the top of this petition to extend suffrage to all regardless of sex, which was presented to Congress on January 29, 1866. It did not pass, and women would not gain the vote for more than half a century after Stanton and others signed this petition. *Petition of E. Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone, Antoinette Brown Blackwell, and Others Asking for an Amendment of the Constitution that Shall Prohibit the Several States from Disfranchising Any of Their Citizens on the Ground of Sex*, 1865. National Archives and Records Administration.

Anthony, made the journey to advocate universal suffrage. Yet they soon realized that their allies were distancing themselves from women's suffrage in order to advance black enfranchisement. Disheartened, Stanton and Anthony allied instead with white supremacists who supported women's equality. Many fellow activists were dismayed by Stanton's and Anthony's willingness to appeal to racism to advance their cause.[25]

These tensions finally erupted over conflicting views of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. Women's rights leaders vigorously protested the Fourteenth Amendment. Although it established national citizenship for all persons born or naturalized in the United States, the amendment also introduced the word *male* into the Constitution for the first time. After the Fifteenth Amendment ignored sex as an unlawful barrier to suffrage, an omission that appalled Stanton, the AERA officially dissolved. Stanton and Anthony formed the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), while suffragists who supported the Fifteenth Amendment, regardless of its limitations, founded the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA).

The NWSA soon rallied around a new strategy: the New Departure. This new approach interpreted the Constitution as *already* guaranteeing women the right to vote. They argued that by nationalizing citizenship for all people and protecting all rights of citizens—including the right to vote—the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments guaranteed women's suffrage. Broadcasting the New Departure, the NWSA encouraged women to register to vote, which roughly seven hundred did between 1868 and 1872. Susan B. Anthony was one of them and was arrested but then acquitted in trial. In 1875, the Supreme Court addressed this constitutional argument: acknowledging women's citizenship but arguing that suffrage was not a right guaranteed to all citizens. This ruling not only defeated the New Departure but also coincided with the Court's broader reactionary interpretation of the Reconstruction amendments that significantly limited freedmen's rights. Following this defeat, many suffragists like Stanton increasingly replaced the ideal of universal suffrage with arguments about the virtue that white women would bring to the polls. These new arguments often hinged on racism and declared the necessity of white women voters to keep black men in check.[26]

Advocates for women's suffrage were largely confined to the North, but southern women were experiencing social transformations as well. The lines between refined white womanhood and degraded enslaved black femaleness were no longer so clearly defined. Moreover, during the war, southern white women had been called on to do traditional men's work, chopping wood and managing businesses. While white southern women decided whether and how to return to their prior status, African American women embraced new freedoms and a redefinition of womanhood.

The Civil War showed white women, especially upper-class women, life without their husbands' protection. Many did not like what they saw, especially given the possibility of racial equality. Formerly wealthy women hoped to maintain their social status by rebuilding the prewar social hierarchy. Through Ladies' Memorial Associations and other civic groups, southern women led the efforts to bury and memorialize the dead, praising and bolstering their men's masculinity through nationalist speeches and memorials. Ladies' Memorial Associations (LMAs) grew out of the Soldiers' Aid Society and became the precursor and custodian of the Lost Cause narrative. Proponents of the Lost Cause tried to rewrite the history of the antebellum South to deemphasize the brutality of slavery. They also created the myth that the Civil War was fought over states' rights instead of slavery, which was the actual cause. LMAs and their

The Fifteenth Amendment prohibited discrimination in voting rights on the basis of race, color, or previous status (i.e., slavery). While the amendment was not all encompassing in that women were not included, it was an extremely significant ruling in affirming the liberties of African American men. This print depicts a huge parade held in Baltimore, Maryland, on May 19, 1870, surrounded by portraits of abolitionists and scenes of African Americans exercising their rights. Thomas Kelly after James C. Beard, *The 15th Amendment. Celebrated May 19th 1870*, 1870. Library of Congress.

ceremonies created new holidays during which white southerners could reaffirm their allegiance to the Confederacy and express their opposition to black rights. For instance, some LMAs celebrated the anniversary of Stonewall Jackson's death on May 10.[27] Through these activities, southern women took on political roles in the South.

Southern black women also sought to redefine their public and private lives. Their efforts to control their labor met the immediate opposition of southern white women. Gertrude Clanton, a plantation mistress before the war, disliked cooking and washing dishes, so she hired an African American woman to do the washing. A misunderstanding quickly developed. The laundress, nameless in Gertrude's records, performed her job and returned home. Gertrude believed that her money had purchased a day's labor, not just the load of washing, and she became quite frustrated. Meanwhile, this washerwoman and others like her set wages and hours for themselves, and in many cases began to take washing into their own homes in order to avoid the surveillance of white women and the sexual threat posed by white men.[28]

Similar conflicts raged across the South. White southerners demanded that African American women work in the plantation home and instituted apprenticeship systems to place African American children in unpaid labor positions. African American women combated these attempts by refusing to work at jobs without fair pay or fair conditions and by clinging tightly to their children.

Like white LMA members, African American women formed clubs to bury their dead, to celebrate African American masculinity, and to provide aid to their communities. On May 1, 1865, African Americans in Charleston created the precursor to the modern Memorial Day by mourning the Union dead buried hastily on a race track turned prison.[29]

Like their white counterparts, the three hundred African American women who participated had been members of the local Patriotic Association, which aided freedpeople during the war. African American women continued participating in federal Decoration Day ceremonies and, later, formed their own club organizations. Racial violence, whether city riots or rural vigilantes, continued to threaten these vulnerable households. Nevertheless, the formation and preservation of African American households became a paramount goal for African American women.

For all of their differences, white and black southern women faced a similar challenge during Reconstruction. Southern women celebrated the return of their brothers, husbands, and sons, but couples separated for many years struggled to adjust. To make matters worse, many of these former soldiers returned with physical or mental wounds. For white families, suicide and divorce became more acceptable, while the opposite occurred for black families. Since the entire South suffered from economic devastation, many families were impoverished and sank into debt. All southern women faced economic devastation, lasting wartime trauma, and enduring racial tensions.

V. Racial Violence in Reconstruction

Violence shattered the dream of biracial democracy. Still steeped in the violence of slavery, white southerners could scarcely imagine black free labor. Congressional investigator Carl Schurz reported that in the summer of 1865, southerners shared a near unanimous sentiment that "You cannot make the negro work, without physical compulsion."[30] Violence had been used in the antebellum period to enforce slave labor and to define racial difference. In the post-emancipation period it was used to stifle black advancement and return to the old order.

Much of life in the antebellum South had been premised on slavery. The social order rested on a subjugated underclass, and the labor system required unfree laborers. A notion of white supremacy and black inferiority undergirded it all. Whites were understood as fit for freedom and citizenship, blacks for chattel slave labor. The Confederate surrender at Appomattox Court House and the subsequent adoption by the U.S. Congress of the Thirteenth Amendment destroyed the institution of American slavery and threw southern society into disarray. The foundation of southern society had been shaken, but southern whites used black codes and racial terrorism to reassert control of former slaves.

The Ku Klux Klan was just one of a number of vigilante groups that arose after the war to terrorize African Americans and Republicans throughout the South. The KKK brought violence into the voting polls, the workplace, and—as seen in this *Harper's Weekly* print—the homes of black Americans. Frank Bellew, *Visit of the Ku-Klux*, 1872. Wikimedia.

Racial violence in the Reconstruction period took three major forms: riots against black political authority, interpersonal fights, and organized vigilante groups. There were riots in southern cities several times during Reconstruction. The most notable were the riots in Memphis and New Orleans in 1866, but other large-scale urban conflicts erupted in places including Laurens, South Carolina, in 1870; Colfax, Louisiana, in 1873; another in New Orleans in 1874; Yazoo City, Mississippi, in 1875; and Hamburg, South Carolina, in 1876. southern cities grew rapidly after the war as migrants from the countryside—particularly freed slaves—flocked to urban centers. Cities became centers of Republican control. But white conservatives chafed at the influx of black residents and the establishment of biracial politics. In nearly every conflict, white conservatives initiated violence in reaction to Republican rallies or conventions or elections in which black men were to vote. The death tolls of these conflicts remain incalculable, and victims were overwhelmingly black.

Even everyday violence between individuals disproportionally targeted African Americans during Reconstruction. African Americans gained citizenship rights like the ability to serve on juries as a result of the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and the Fourteenth Amendment. But southern white men were almost never prosecuted for violence against black victims. White men beat or shot black men with relative impunity, and did so over minor squabbles, labor disputes, long-standing grudges, and crimes of passion. These incidents sometimes were reported to local federal authorities like the army or the Freedmen's Bureau, but more often than not such violence was unreported and unprosecuted.[31]

The violence committed by organized vigilante groups, sometimes called nightriders or bushwhackers, was more often premeditated. Groups of nightriders operated under cover of darkness and wore disguises to curtail black political involvement. Nightriders harassed and killed black candidates and officeholders and frightened voters away from the polls. They also aimed to limit black economic mobility by terrorizing freedpeople who tried to purchase land or otherwise become too independent from the white masters they used to rely on. They were terrorists and vigilantes, determined to stop the erosion of the antebellum South, and they were widespread and numerous, operating throughout the South. The Ku Klux Klan emerged in the late 1860s as the most infamous of these groups.

The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) was organized in 1866 in Pulaski, Tennessee, and had spread to nearly every state of the former Confederacy by 1868. The Klan drew heavily from the antebellum southern elite, but Klan groups sometimes overlapped with criminal gangs or former Confederate guerrilla groups. The Klan's reputation became so potent, and its violence so widespread, that many groups not formally associated with it were called Ku Kluxers, and to "Ku Klux" meant to commit vigilante violence. While it is difficult to differentiate Klan actions from those of similar groups, such as the White Line, the Knights of the White Camellia, and the White Brotherhood, the distinctions hardly matter. All such groups were part of a web of terror that spread throughout the South during Reconstruction. In Panola County, Mississippi, between August 1870 and December 1872, twenty-four Klan-style murders occurred. And nearby, in Lafayette County, Klansmen drowned thirty black Mississippians in a single mass murder. Sometimes the violence was aimed at black men or women who had tried to buy land or dared to be insolent toward a white southerner. Other times, as with the beating of Republican sheriff

and tax collector Allen Huggins, the Klan targeted white politicians who supported freedpeople's civil rights. Numerous Republican politicians, perhaps dozens, were killed, either while in office or while campaigning. Thousands of individual citizens, men and women, white and black, had their homes raided and were whipped, raped, or murdered.[32]

The federal government responded to southern paramilitary tactics by passing the Enforcement Acts between 1870 and 1871. The acts made it criminal to deprive African Americans of their civil rights. The acts also deemed violent Klan behavior as acts of rebellion against the United States and allowed for the use of U.S. troops to protect freedpeople. For a time, the federal government, its courts, and its troops, sought to put an end to the KKK and related groups. But the violence continued. By 1876, as southern Democrats reestablished "home rule" and "redeemed" the South from Republicans, federal opposition to the KKK weakened.

The federal government created the Freedmen's Bureau to assist freed people in securing their rights and their livelihoods. In this *Harper's Weekly* print, The Freedmen's Bureau official protecting the black men and women from the angry and riotous mob of white Americans stood as a representation of the entire bureau. Soon the bureau and the federal government would recognize that they could not accomplish a fraction of what they set out to do, including keeping African Americans safe and free in the South. Alfred R. Waud, *The Freedmen's Bureau*, 1868. Library of Congress.