

Thaddeus Stevens

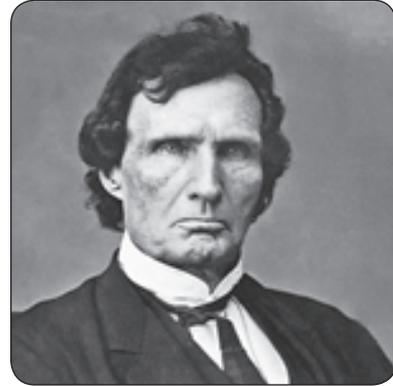
1792–1868



WHY HE MADE HISTORY Thaddeus Stevens was one of the most radical politicians of the Reconstruction era. His contributions to key actions taken by Congress during the years following the Civil War make him an important historical figure.



As you read the biography below, think about how Thaddeus Stevens's outspokenness brought his views to the front of the political scene of Reconstruction.



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Said to be honest, daring, and quick-witted, Thaddeus Stevens won the respect of even those who opposed his political ideas.

In his first years in politics, Stevens served in the Pennsylvania legislature. His strong opposition to slavery and support of the state's African American population began then. As a delegate to the Pennsylvania constitutional convention of 1838, Stevens refused to sign the constitution because only white men were given the right to vote.

Stevens began the first of his terms in the U.S. Congress in 1849. During the Civil War, Stevens served as head of the House Committee on Ways and Means. He called for the emancipation and arming of slaves. He also argued for the rights of African Americans in the South to vote.

Stevens believed that the Reconstruction period was a chance for the United States to become united in all ways, and this included ending racial discrimination. Stevens's efforts led to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1866, which guaranteed African Americans the same civil rights as white Americans. The 14th Amendment of the Constitution, which

VOCABULARY

confiscated seized

impeachment to charge a public officer with misconduct

interred buried

defined African Americans as citizens, was also a result of Stevens's efforts.

Stevens was regarded as the most radical of the Radical Republicans. He argued that southern planters' should have their lands **confiscated** and divided among the former slaves who had worked on those plantations. He believed that the Confederate states were "conquered provinces" and should be treated as such.

Thinking that President Andrew Johnson's Reconstruction plan was too lenient on the South, Stevens became one of the first to call for Johnson's impeachment. Stevens's ideas were too different from those of others in the Republican Party. When the Reconstruction Act of 1867 was passed, Stevens lost his prominence in the political spotlight.

As a final act to show his deep belief in racial equality, Stevens arranged for his burial in an African American cemetery, where he was eventually **interred** in 1868.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

- 1. Draw Conclusions** Why was Reconstruction an important time for people like Thaddeus Stevens to express "radical" ideas?

- 2. Expressing and Supporting a Point of View** What do you think was Stevens's most important contribution to American history?

ACTIVITY

- 3.** Thaddeus Stevens wrote his own epitaph before his death to ensure that people knew why he had chosen his burial location. Write a new epitaph for Stevens. Be sure to reference important aspects of his life.