

Adelbert Ames Biography

Adelbert Ames

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Biography

The American political leader Adelbert Ames (1835-1933) was active in Reconstruction politics, serving as U.S. senator, governor, and leader of the Radical wing of the Mississippi Republican party.

On Oct. 31, 1835, Adelbert Ames was born at Rockland, Maine. He served as a cabin boy aboard a trading schooner, was an outstanding student at school, and developed a strong sense of duty. He received an appointment to West Point Military Academy and graduated fifth in his class just as the Civil War was beginning in 1861. He received the Congressional Medal of Honor for bravery at the First Battle of Bull Run, won promotion to the rank of brigadier general of volunteers, and by the end of the war had become lieutenant colonel in the regular army.

In 1868 he was appointed provisional military governor of Mississippi, where he worked hard to protect the newly freed slaves from harassment by whites and came to regard himself as their protector. As governor, he supervised elections in 1869, in which both black and white citizens participated to ratify a new state constitution and select officials for the civilian government. The newly elected legislature then chose Ames to represent the state in the U.S. Senate. In Washington he helped pass an extension of the Ku Klux Klan Act and emerged as the leader of the Radical wing of the Mississippi Republican party.

He was elected governor in 1873 but was unable to implement his program because of increasing terrorism aimed at intimidating voters, particularly African Americans, in order to reestablish white supremacy. His attempts to suppress this violence were unsuccessful, and Ames saw his party lose the next election to the Democrats. Disillusioned by his failure to aid the African Americans and isolated in the governor's mansion by a hostile Democratic legislature, Ames resigned his office in 1876.

He moved to New Jersey and then to Massachusetts, where he engaged in various business activities. In 1898, when the Spanish-American War began, he was appointed brigadier general of volunteers again and took part in the siege of Santiago, Cuba. After the war he retired but remained alert and active for the remainder of his long life. He spent his summers in Massachusetts and his winters in Florida, where on April 12, 1933, he died at the age of 98.