# 1868

## *Ulysses S. Grant vs Horatio Seymour*

A 50-minute lesson on the 1868 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, background reading with primary source, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

| | |
|---|---|
| ERA<br>Reconstruction | ELECTORAL VOTES<br>294 total |
| WINNER<br>Ulysses S. Grant (Republican) · 214 EV | RUNNER-UP<br>Horatio Seymour (Democratic) · 80 EV |
| KEY ISSUE<br>Reconstruction policy; Black suffrage; wartime debt repayment | TURNOUT<br>80.9% |

CONTENTS

1. Cover
2. Lesson plan (50 min)
3. Background: key terms + source
4. Worksheet (6 questions)
5. Answer key

# 1868: Ulysses S. Grant vs Horatio Seymour

## Standards alignment

NCSS · D2.His.4.6-8 (chronological reasoning) · D2.His.14.6-8 (causation). CCSS · CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2 (central ideas in primary sources).

## Timing

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **5 min** | **Warm-up** | List two political conditions in 1868 that would produce a Republican landslide. For each, identify the specific 1865-1868 development most responsible. |
| **15 min** | **Reading + vocab** | The 1868 election was the 21st U.S. presidential election. It was the first U.S. presidential election after the Civil War; the first in which Black Americans in the South could legally vote; and the first to test whether the constitutional changes of Reconstruction (the 13th and 14th Amendments) could be sustained politically. The election produced Ulysses S. Grant's decisive victory and confirmed Republican control of Reconstruction for another four years.<br><br>The political environment was dominated by Reconstruction. After Lincoln's April 1865 assassination, Vice President Andrew Johnson had become the 17th president. Johnson and the Radical Republican congressional majority had fundamentally conflicting visions of Reconstruction. The conflict produced: the 1865 Black Codes (Southern legislatures restricting Black labor mobility and civil rights); the 1866 Civil Rights Act (passed over Johnson's veto); the Fourteenth Amendment (ratified July 9, 1868 - birthright citizenship, equal protection, congressional representation tied to voting rights); the 1867 Reconstruction Acts (placing the South under military rule); the 1867 Tenure of Office Act (limiting Johnson's ability to fire Cabinet officials); and Johnson's February 1868 impeachment. The Senate trial ended May 16, 1868 with Johnson acquitted by 35-19 (the Senate needed 36 votes for two-thirds removal - one short).<br><br>The Republican Party - dominated by Radicals after the Johnson impeachment - met in Chicago on May 20-21, 1868. The convention nominated Ulysses S. Grant unanimously on the first ballot. Grant was 46 years old, the Union army's top general during the Civil War, and the most popular American since Washington. He had accepted Robert E. Lee's April 9, 1865 surrender at Appomattox Court House. He had been Johnson's Secretary of War briefly (August 1867 - February 1868) before resigning over the Tenure of Office Act dispute - a resignation that politically validated Radical Republican opposition to Johnson. Schuyler Colfax of Indiana (Speaker of the House) was the vice presidential candidate.<br><br>The Democratic Party met in New York City on July 4-9, 1868. The convention |

deadlocked through 21 ballots between Senator George H. Pendleton of Ohio (a Peace Democrat), Senator Thomas A. Hendricks of Indiana, former Treasury Secretary Salmon P. Chase, and President Andrew Johnson himself. On the 22nd ballot the convention nominated former Governor Horatio Seymour of New York - a Peace Democrat who had opposed Lincoln during the Civil War. Seymour was politically tainted by his association with Copperhead sentiment (during the 1863 Draft Riots in New York City, then-Governor Seymour had addressed the rioters as "my friends"). Frank Blair Jr. of Missouri was the vice presidential candidate. Blair publicly declared his opposition to Reconstruction in inflammatory terms - his "Brodhead letter" advocated Black disenfranchisement and military reversal of Reconstruction state governments.

The 1868 election was politically transformative for several reasons. (1) The 1867 Reconstruction Acts had required Southern states to allow Black male voters as a condition of readmission to the Union. Seven of the eleven former Confederate states had been readmitted under Reconstruction governments by November 1868: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee. Black voters in these states cast hundreds of thousands of votes - the first significant Black voting in U.S. history. (2) Black voters supported Grant overwhelmingly (around 90% based on contemporary estimates). (3) Three former Confederate states - Mississippi, Texas, Virginia - had not yet been readmitted and did not vote in 1868. (4) The Ku Klux Klan, founded in 1865-1866, conducted violent suppression of Black voters in parts of Georgia and Louisiana - reducing Black turnout in those states but not preventing Republican victories.

Grant won 214 electoral votes to Seymour's 80. Grant carried 26 of 34 voting states; Seymour carried 8 (Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Oregon - with New York giving Seymour his largest electoral block). The popular vote was 3,013,650 (52.7%) to 2,708,744 (47.3%) - much closer than the electoral margin suggests. Grant's margin in the popular vote (305,000) was smaller than the estimated Black vote (around 700,000) in his column - meaning that without Black voters, Seymour might have won the popular vote.

Grant was inaugurated March 4, 1869. His two terms would deliver: the February 3, 1870 ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment (prohibiting race-based denial of voting rights - the third Reconstruction Amendment); the May 1870 Enforcement Act and 1871 Ku Klux Klan Act (federal prosecution of Klan violence; 5,000 indictments and over 600 convictions in 1871-72); the May 1872 Amnesty Act (restoring political rights to most former Confederate officials); the 1872 re-election (286-66 over Horace Greeley); but also major corruption scandals (Credit Mobilier 1872-73, Whiskey Ring 1875, Indian Ring 1876) that damaged the Republican Party. The 1873 Panic produced a deep depression that further damaged Republican electoral prospects. The 1877 Compromise would effectively end Reconstruction under Grant's successor Rutherford B. Hayes.

**10 min** **Primary source**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | Read aloud once. Annotate individually. Quick pair-share on the source-analysis question. |
| **10 min** | **Discussion** | Small groups (3–4). Pick one prompt; report back two sentences. |
| **10 min** | **Worksheet** | Six questions: 2 multiple-choice, 3 short-answer, 1 map-read. |

# Background

Before the worksheet, review the key terms below and then read the primary source carefully. The two source-analysis questions on the worksheet (questions 6 and 7) ask you to quote from the excerpt.

## Key terms

### Reconstruction

The 1865-1877 period when the federal government tried to rebuild the South after the Civil War and protect the rights of newly freed Black Americans. Ended with the 1877 Compromise that withdrew federal troops from the South.

### Fifteenth Amendment

Ratified February 3, 1870. Prohibited federal or state denial of voting rights based on race, color, or previous condition of servitude. The third of the Reconstruction Amendments.

### Tenure of Office Act

The 1867 federal law (passed over Johnson's veto) limiting the president's ability to fire Cabinet officials without Senate consent. Johnson's violation of the Act in firing Secretary of War Edwin Stanton was the basis for his February 1868 impeachment.

### Fourteenth Amendment

Ratified July 9, 1868. Established birthright citizenship; required equal protection of the laws; reduced congressional representation for states denying voting rights. The constitutional foundation of modern American civil rights law.

### Reconstruction Acts of 1867

The federal laws that placed the former Confederacy under military rule and required Southern states to ratify the 14th Amendment, allow Black male voters, and adopt new state constitutions as conditions of readmission to the Union.

### Ku Klux Klan

A violent white-supremacist organization founded in Tennessee in 1865-1866 by former Confederate soldiers. The Klan attacked Black Americans, white Republicans, and federal officials in the South during Reconstruction. The 1871 federal Ku Klux Klan Act produced 5,000 indictments and over 600 convictions.

## First Inaugural Address

**ULYSSES S. GRANT, MARCH 4, 1869**

*Grant took the oath at the East Portico of the U.S. Capitol on March 4, 1869, two months after Andrew Johnson's troubled term ended. Grant's address was strikingly brief - 1,128 words. He explicitly endorsed the 15th Amendment (then in the ratification process) and supported continued federal protection of Black civil rights. The "no policy other than that which is the policy of the people" framing positioned Grant as a constitutional servant rather than a Radical Republican partisan.*

> *"The country having just emerged from a great rebellion, many questions will come before it for settlement in the next four years which preceding Administrations have never had to deal with. In meeting these it is desirable that they should be approached calmly, without prejudice, hate, or sectional pride, remembering that the greatest good to the greatest number is the object to be attained. This requires security of person, property, and free religious and political opinion in every part of our common country, without regard to local prejudice. All laws to secure these ends will receive my best efforts for their enforcement."*

**Grant, "First Inaugural Address" (Washington, DC, March 4, 1869). Public domain.**

# The 1868 Election

Read the background page, then answer the six questions below.

**QUESTION 1 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE**

How many electoral votes did Ulysses S. Grant win in 1868?

( ) A. 189
( ) B. 203
( ) C. 214
( ) D. 247

**QUESTION 2 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE**

On which ballot did the Democratic Party nominate Horatio Seymour in 1868?

( ) A. 12th
( ) B. 17th
( ) C. 22nd
( ) D. 36th

**QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER**

How did the Reconstruction Acts of 1867 transform Southern politics before the 1868 election?

**QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER**

Why was Grant's 305,000-vote popular margin politically significant despite the 214-80 electoral landslide?

**QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER**

Grant says in his inaugural that he will enforce all laws securing "security of person, property, and free religious and political opinion in every part of our common country." What specific Reconstruction-era civil-rights commitment was he making?

**QUESTION 6 · MAP-READ**

On the 1868 election map, identify the 8 states Seymour carried. What pattern emerges, and what does it tell you about Northern Democratic strongholds in the post-war period?

# Answer key

## QUESTION 1

214. Grant 214; Seymour 80. Grant carried 26 of 34 voting states.

Three former Confederate states had not been readmitted and did not vote.

## QUESTION 2

22nd. The Democratic Convention deadlocked through 21 ballots before nominating Seymour on the 22nd. The pattern reflected Democratic Party divisions between Peace Democrats, hard-money advocates, and Reconstruction opponents.

AP students should know the 22-ballot nomination as a sign of Democratic Party factionalism in the immediate post-war period.

## QUESTION 3

The 1867 Reconstruction Acts placed the former Confederacy under military rule and required Southern states to: (1) ratify the 14th Amendment; (2) allow Black male voters; (3) adopt new state constitutions; (4) hold ratification conventions and elections under federal military supervision as conditions of readmission to the Union. The Acts transformed Southern politics by enfranchising approximately 700,000 Black voters and disenfranchising approximately 100,000 former Confederate officials. The Acts created the Reconstruction governments that would govern Southern states until federal troops withdrew in 1877. The 1868 election was the first U.S. presidential election in which Southern Reconstruction governments participated.

AP students should be able to identify the Reconstruction Acts as the structural basis of post-war Southern politics.

## QUESTION 4

The 305,000-vote popular margin was much smaller than the estimated Black vote of 700,000 in Grant's column. Without Black voters, Seymour might have won the popular vote (though Grant would still have won the Electoral College via Northern states). The political significance: Black voter participation was structurally decisive for the popular-vote outcome - the first time in U.S. history a non-white voting bloc was electorally consequential. The political fragility: when Reconstruction ended in 1877, Black voters were systematically disenfranchised, and the political settlement of 1868 would not be sustainable. The 1868 election thus simultaneously demonstrated that multiracial democracy was possible and that it was structurally vulnerable to white-supremacist suppression.

AP students should be able to articulate the structural significance of Black voting.

## QUESTION 5

Grant was committing to federal enforcement of the Reconstruction Amendments (the 13th, 14th, and the soon-to-be-ratified 15th). The "security of person, property, and free religious and political opinion" framework explicitly referenced the constitutional protections being extended to Black Americans in the South. Grant's commitment to "enforcement" was politically critical: he was signaling that his administration would use federal power to protect Black civil rights against Southern white-supremacist resistance. The May 1870 Enforcement Act and the 1871 Ku Klux Klan Act operationalized this commitment - producing 5,000 indictments and over 600 convictions of Klan members in 1871-72. The framework would dominate Reconstruction policy through 1877.

AP students should be able to identify Grant's civil-rights commitment and its operational consequences.

## QUESTION 6

Seymour states: Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Oregon. Pattern: New England commercial centers (Connecticut, New Jersey, New York City's influence on New York State), Border States (Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland), upper-South Reconstruction states with active Klan suppression of Black voters (Georgia, Louisiana), and one Pacific state (Oregon). The pattern reveals: (1) Democrats retained significant urban-Northeast strength; (2) Border States favored Democrats; (3) Reconstruction-state results were structurally affected by Klan violence reducing Black turnout. The structural significance: even with Reconstruction in place, Democrats retained competitive footing in significant parts of the country - which is why the 1877 Compromise's end of Reconstruction would produce a long-term Democratic recovery.

AP students should be able to read the 1868 map as evidence of both Reconstruction's effects and its structural limits.