

## Reconstruction Figures Student Response Packet

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

**Essential Question:** Who were the key black figures during the Reconstruction Era and Gilded Age and how did they demonstrate power and agency?

### Do Now:

Based on what you know from prior classes, do you believe that there was a point in time when black Americans began to grow in power? Explain.

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**Do Now Connection:** We have spent time exploring how Black people used power and agency during enslavement. Today, we continue to explore how this is seen following the end of enslavement during the Reconstruction Era and Gilded Age specifically with members of the Black Elite.

### Invest in the Essential Question:

What are the keywords in our Essential Question? Rewrite the Essential Question in your own words below:

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## Background and Context

What do you think is a black elite? What characteristics do they possess?

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Respond to the following prompts as you watch and analyze this featurette video from the show [Gilded Age](#).

1. What kind of jobs were African Americans getting during this time in America?

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2. Do you believe that African Americans gained power during this time? Explain.

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3. Based on the featurette, what surprised you the most and what did you already know from past lessons?

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**Group/Partner Activity: Student Investigation**

At this point we all know that the black elites existed during the Reconstruction. They were able to gain this status based on the people who fought for their rights around the country. Identify the key black contributors to the Reconstruction Era. Utilize the slides to summarize the impact of each of the contributors connecting it back to power and agency below.

1. Robert B Elliott

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2. Ida B Wells

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3. Frederick Douglass

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4. Hiram Rhodes Revels

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**Reconstruction in Five Acts**

Materials by Ascend Social Studies,  
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**Independent Activity:** Choose one of the following texts to learn more about the Black elites. You can select either Ida B. Wells or Hiram Revels. As you read, closely annotate the text then answer the following questions below.

**Source A: Hiram Revels**

**March 16, 1870**

A month after being sworn in, Mississippi Senator Hiram Rhodes Revels, the first Black member of either house of Congress in U.S. history, gives his first speech on the floor of the Senate. His comments address a debate on whether Congress should force the Georgia state legislature to accept twenty-nine Black state representatives and three Black state senators who had recently been elected but were being denied their seats.

This is a found poem derived from the text of Revels's historic speech.

# Like to the Rushing of a Mighty Wind

Tracy K. Smith

I rise. I rise, lifting my voice.  
My term is short, fraught,  
and I bear about me daily  
the keenest sense of the power  
of blacks to shed hallowed light,  
to welcome the Good News.

Weary of bondage, sorrow,  
adjudication delayed, they wait  
and they wait. The feelings  
which animate them are, by God's  
law, natural, logical. Alone,  
my own race acts in interrogation:

Would the country believe its  
borders wide enough for all truly  
loyal men to find within them peace?  
And be that loyal man black, will  
his pursuit of liberty and happiness  
find feuds and contentions, death

and disaster, the very air dark  
as an ugly dream? Many of my race  
sleep in the countless graves  
of the South. If our dead could speak,  
what a voice, like to the rushing  
of a mighty wind, would come up

from the ground. Her whole people,  
white and colored, should race  
to each other wholly and with honor,  
meet and fit for admission of events  
transpired. Now, sir. Sir, now. I wish  
my last word upon the bill before us to be:

Now.



## Source B: Ida B. Wells

September 15, 1883

A conductor on a train traveling from Memphis to Woodstock, Tennessee, insists that Ida B. Wells leave her seat in the first-class rear car and move to the rougher front car, where drinking and smoking are permitted. Wells refuses and is forcibly removed from the train. Afterward, she sues the Chesapeake, Ohio, and Southwestern Railroad Company. She wins and is awarded \$500 in damages, but the Tennessee Supreme Court overturns the ruling. Afterward, she writes, "O God, is there no redress, no peace, no justice in this land for us?"

no car for colored [+] ladies  
(or, miss wells goes off [on] the rails)

Evie Shockley

—memphis, 1883

she wasn't born a hero, you know. once, she  
was twenty: four years an orphan, eighteen years

free. with a passion for brontë & a weakness for  
fashion, she might drop a month of her schoolteacher's  
salary on clothing at menken's palatial emporium,

to dress as befits a lady. she pays to ride first class  
that autumn afternoon, knowing she looks the part: full

skirt, cinched waist, gloves, crown. boarding, she peeps  
the drunken white man smoking up the "colored car,"

& no. she's not buying it. her place is in the *ladies'* car.  
i know she wasn't born a hero, but once ida b. wells

addresses what befits a lady who pays to ride first class  
(to drift into anywhich seat she selects), she's becoming one.  
outfit be damned, she resists her ouster, till her sleeve's

torn & the conductor's bleeding. she'll pull these threads  
until the whole *threadbare lie* of lynching unravels.

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Guided Questions:

1. Which source did you read?

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2. What is the context of this source? What was happening during the time period it was written in?

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3. Who is the speaker's audience? Who is this text written for? Explain.

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4. What is the author's purpose or motivation for creating this document? Explain.

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5. What is the main idea of the source you selected? How does the author feel about the topic? Is there a bias?

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6. How did these Black Elites demonstrate power and agency?

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