

Who's Who of Reconstruction - Grade Level

Lawrence Sullivan "Sul" Ross

Lawrence Sullivan "Sul" Ross was born in the U.S. territory of Iowa in 1838 to Shapley and Catherine Ross. In 1839, the family moved to Texas. They lived for a time in Austin before settling in Waco, where his father ran a plantation.

Sul Ross attended Baylor University and then moved to Alabama to attend Wesleyan University. He returned to Texas during his junior year at Wesleyan University and enlisted in the United States Army. During his service, he took part in campaigns against American Indians along the Texas frontier. He was severely wounded in a battle in October 1858, with the Wichita Indians in present-day Oklahoma. When he recovered from his wounds, he returned to Wesleyan University to finish his degree before returning to Texas.

When he returned to Texas, Ross joined the Texas Rangers and made a name for himself taking part in campaigns against the Comanches in west Texas. He was part of the group that discovered Cynthia Ann Parker living with the Comanches in 1860 and brought her back to her Anglo family, despite her desire to remain with her Comanche family.

In 1861, Ross married Elizabeth Dorothy Tinsley, who was the daughter of a Waco planter. When the Civil War began, Ross resigned from the Rangers and enlisted in the Confederate Army, where he served as a major, then colonel in the Sixth Texas Cavalry. He fought in several battles in the Western Theater including the Battles of Pea Ridge, Corinth, and Atlanta. While Ross was on a short break from his service in Texas in May 1865, his unit surrendered in Mississippi.

Ross' health had declined during the Civil War. During much of Reconstruction he worked on his farm near Waco with his wife and children. In 1873, Ross was elected Sheriff of McLennan County and helped establish the Sheriff's Association of Texas.

Ross served as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1876, where he helped to write the state's third Reconstruction constitution. This constitution was established to reverse many of the measures taken by the Republican-controlled state legislature in 1869. One of its primary goals was to remove power from the state level and return it to the local governments.

Ross would go on to play a significant role in the Texas state government after Reconstruction. He served as a state senator and then eventually served two terms as governor of Texas in 1886 and 1888.

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Edmund Jackson Davis

Edmund Jackson Davis was born in Florida in 1827 to William and Mary Ann Davis. In 1848, when Davis was 21, he and his family moved to Galveston, Texas, where he worked as a clerk in the post office and studied law. The following year, Davis moved to Corpus Christi where he continued his studies, becoming a lawyer in 1849.

During the years that followed, he worked as a customs collector in Laredo. Customs collectors are responsible for enforcing and collecting customs, or taxes on foreign goods that enter a country. He also served as the district attorney of Brownsville in South Texas. In 1856, Governor Elisha M. Pease appointed Davis as a judge of the district court at Brownsville. Davis married the daughter of a state senator, Elizabeth Anne Britton, in 1858, and the couple had two sons.

As sectionalism divided the country, Davis strongly opposed secession. He served as a delegate to the Secession Convention in 1861, where he was one of the few Texans who voted against secession. After Texas seceded, Davis refused to take the loyalty oath to the Confederacy. As a result, he was removed from his position as judge on April 24, 1861.

Davis and several other pro-Union Texans fled to Washington, D.C., during the Civil War. They met with President Abraham Lincoln, who offered to provide arms, or weapons, for Davis so he could raise troops for the Union. Davis joined the United States Army as a colonel and was authorized to recruit men into the First Texas Cavalry unit in the U.S. Army. Davis's unit took part in action at Galveston and along the Rio Grande border, before he was transferred to western Mississippi during the Civil War.

After the Civil War, Davis returned to Texas and took part in the state government during Congressional Reconstruction. He was elected to the state Senate in 1866 and served as a delegate to the Constitutional Conventions of 1866 and 1868. He supported limiting the political rights of ex-Confederates and expanding rights for Black Texans.

Davis was elected governor of Texas in 1869, winning by a small margin. His administration significantly increased the power of the state government by establishing a State Police force and expanding the public school system throughout the state. Davis's administration paid for these policies by raising taxes, which many Texans opposed.

Davis ran for a second term as governor in 1875, but he was defeated by an ex-Confederate named Richard Coke. Davis argued that the election was not legitimate and refused to leave office, so he was removed from office by a militia that supported Richard Coke.

Davis continued to remain active in the Republican Party of Texas. He attempted to run again for governor and the state legislature, but he was defeated in both elections. Edmund Davis died in Austin on February 7, 1883, and was buried in the State Cemetery.

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George Thompson Ruby

George Thompson Ruby was a Black man, who was born free in the Northern state of New York in 1841 to Reuben and Rachel Ruby. George's family moved to Maine, another Northern state, when he was a child. He attended a university in Maine and then traveled to the Caribbean Islands for a job with a Northern newspaper. In this role, Ruby reported on how Black Americans who were enslaved in the South could flee to freedom in Haiti.

Ruby returned to the United States in 1864, the year before the Civil War ended. He settled in Louisiana and worked as a teacher, but he fled the state in 1866 after being attacked by a white mob while he was trying to establish a school for Black students. He moved to Texas, settled in Galveston, and began to work for the Freedmen's Bureau.

During his time with the Freedmen's Bureau, Ruby worked to expand education to Black Texans and taught at the Methodist Episcopal Church of Galveston. He wrote articles for newspapers, and established his own newspaper called the *Galveston Standard*. He also worked as a traveling agent of the Freedmen's Bureau, visiting towns across Texas in order to establish chapters of the Union League. The Union League was an organization that provided services to newly freed Black Southerners. In 1868, he served as president of the Galveston Union League. He also served as a delegate to the National Republican Convention, where he was the only Black Texan in the Texas delegation. The same year, he served as a delegate to the state Constitutional Convention of 1868-1869.

In 1869, Ruby was appointed deputy collector of customs at Galveston. His responsibilities included enforcing and collecting taxes and fees for imported items. During Ruby's time in this position, he developed partnerships with important political figures like Governor Edmund J. Davis, as well as judges, and prominent Galveston businessmen.

Ruby was elected to the Texas state Senate in 1869. As a state senator, he played a significant role in maintaining and running Galveston's judicial system, militia, and public education. He worked to establish and expand the railroad systems connecting Galveston to the rest of the state. He also worked to support the rights of workers in Galveston and established the first Labor Union of Colored Men at Galveston.

By 1873, ex-Confederates began regaining power in the Texas government. Ruby decided to move back to Louisiana, where he continued his political work in support of the rights of Black citizens.

George Thompson Ruby died of malaria in New Orleans on October 31, 1882. He was one of three Black men who served in the Texas legislature during Reconstruction.

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Shepherd Mullens

Shepherd Mullens (sometimes spelled Shepart Mullins) was born into slavery in Alabama in 1828 or 1829. He was brought to Texas in 1854. Not much is known about Mullens's life before and during slavery.

After slavery was abolished in 1865 at the end of the Civil War, Mullens made a new life for himself in Waco. Between 1865 and 1870, Mullens acquired property in Waco and the surrounding McLennan County. In 1867, he married Sallie Downs.

When the United States Congress took over the Reconstruction of the South in 1867, Southern states were divided into military districts that were each placed under martial law. Texas was part of the Fifth Military District under the command of Major General Charles Griffin, who appointed Mullens to serve on the board of voter registrars for McLennan County. In this role, Mullens was responsible for registering people in his country to vote in elections.

That same year in 1867, Mullens served on a committee for planning the first Republican Party Convention in Texas. In 1868, Mullens was elected to serve as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1868-1869. During his time as a delegate to the Convention, he served on several important committees that focused on public property and business. In 1869, Major General Griffin appointed Mullens to serve a four-year term as a McLennan County commissioner. As a commissioner, Mullens managed the county budget and oversaw essential services within McLennan County.

Mullens served as the Vice President of the Republican Convention in 1869. He was elected to the Texas House of Representatives later that year. He supported measures promoting safety, including the establishment of the Texas State Police and militia.

Shepherd Mullens died on August 7, 1871, at the age of 42 or 43, and was buried at the First Street Cemetery in Waco. Shepherd Mullens was one of three Black Texans who served in the Texas legislature during Reconstruction.

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Elisha Pease

Elisha Marshall Pease was born in the Northern state of Connecticut on January 3, 1812, to Lorrain Thompson and Sarah Pease. As a young man he attended school in Massachusetts, where he studied law. In search of new opportunities, Pease migrated to Texas in 1835, when Texas was still a part of Mexico.

Shortly after Pease arrived in Texas, the Texas Revolution began. He took part in the first battle of the war at Gonzales. He also served on the provisional government, and as a delegate to the convention at Washington-on-the-Brazos, where he helped write part of the Constitution of the Republic of Texas. During the Republic of Texas era, Pease served in the legislature and helped write the young nation's criminal code. In 1837, Pease became a successful lawyer in Brazoria. In 1850, Pease married Lucadia Christiana Niles, and they had three daughters.

After Texas joined the United States, Pease served in the state legislature. He then served two terms as the governor of Texas in 1853 and 1855, where he focused on expanding and financing public education.

Before the Civil War, Pease was a strong Unionist who had opposed secession. When the war ended, he worked to organize the Republican Party of Texas. When the United States Congress took control of Reconstruction in 1867, the South was divided into five military districts under martial law. Texas was part of the Fifth Military District under the command of General Philip Sheridan. Sheridan removed the acting Governor and ex-Confederate James Throckmorton from office and appointed Pease to serve in his place. Although Pease was a Republican, he considered many of the actions of other Texas Republicans too extreme. His opposition caused conflict among Pease and the other Republican leaders in the state, and as a result of this conflict, Pease resigned his position as governor in 1869.

Pease remained active in Texas politics after he left office. He served as the chairman of the Texas delegation to the National Liberal Republican Convention in 1872. In his later years, Pease practiced law and took part in various business opportunities in Austin, where he lived with his wife and two surviving daughters.

Elisha Pease died on August 26, 1883, and was buried in Austin.

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James Webb Throckmorton

James Webb Throckmorton was born on February 1, 1825, in Tennessee. His family moved to Arkansas in 1836, and then Texas in 1840. They settled in Collin County in north Texas. As a young man, Throckmorton studied medicine and served in the U.S.-Mexico War, though he was released from service because of health problems related to kidney disease.

During the 1850s, Throckmorton served three terms as a member of the Texas House of Representatives. In this position, he supported public education and the expansion of railroads in Texas. In the years leading to the Civil War, Throckmorton opposed secession, even serving as a delegate to the Secession Convention in 1861, where he was one of only eight Texans who voted against seceding from the Union.

Even though Throckmorton opposed secession, he fought in the Confederate Army in defense of his state during the Civil War. Unfortunately, ongoing problems related to his kidney disease forced him to end his service in the Confederate Army in 1863.

After the Civil War, Throckmorton served as the chairman to Texas's Constitutional Convention. He helped write the Texas Constitution of 1866, which limited the rights of Black Texans and refused to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery. Later that same year, Throckmorton was elected governor.

In 1867, the United States Congress impeached President Andrew Johnson and took over the process of reconstructing the South. Congressional Reconstruction divided the South into military districts under martial law. It also required new state constitutions, new elections, and loyalty oaths from ex-Confederate leaders. Congress also required states to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery, and also the Fourteenth Amendment, which granted citizenship to the newly freed Black Southerners. Governor Throckmorton refused to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment, because he claimed that Texans did not support the measure. He was removed from office on July 30, 1867.

Throckmorton returned to his home in McKinney where he spoke out against Congressional Reconstruction. By the 1870s, ex-Confederates were beginning to return to power in state governments across the South, including Texas. He was elected to the Texas legislature five times during the 1870s and 1880s, where he worked to expand the railroad system in Texas.

James Webb Throckmorton died at his home in McKinney in 1894. The people of McKinney built a statue in his honor that reads, "A Tennessean by Birth, a Texan by Adoption."

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Martha Goodwin Tunstall

Martha Adair Goodwin (Tunstall) was born in Alabama on December 29, 1838, to Hugh and Rebecca Adair Goodwin. She was the oldest of nine children. Her parents were wealthy Alabama planters with 1,000 acres and twenty-six slaves. Martha moved with her family to Texas around 1856, after completing her studies at Union College in Alabama.

In Texas, Martha taught school at the Crockett Ladies Academy, and she taught the children of a planter at a local plantation. While working at the plantation, Martha witnessed an overseer beating one of the enslaved people. She was deeply troubled by the experience and wrote about it in her journal, asking "When will this all end?" She went on to state, "What a horrible curse on mankind is slavery," and calling it "the worst of all evils."

On December 29, 1858, Martha married William Vaughn Tunstall. William was a teacher, lawyer, farmer, and Methodist minister. Together, the couple had nine children from 1861 to 1881.

During the Civil War, Martha and William moved their family North to Ohio and then Minnesota where William spoke out against the Civil War, and Martha advocated against slavery. They moved back to Texas in 1866 after the war, settling in Anderson County in East Texas.

William served as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1868-1869, and the family moved with him to Austin for a short time while he took part in the convention. While in Austin, Martha became active in the Austin Friends of Female Suffrage organization that advocated for women's right to vote. In 1869, Martha became the vice-president of the Texas chapter of the National Woman Suffrage Association. She played an active role in the organization throughout the 1870s.

When the Constitutional Convention ended in 1869, the couple moved back to their East Texas home. They faced threats and harassment for their political beliefs. People destroyed their crops, vandalized their property, and attacked their livestock. On one occasion, their family water well was even poisoned. The poisoned water killed two of Martha's sons, who were five and seven at the time of their death.

Despite facing the danger and opposition, Martha and William stood firm in their beliefs. William served as a minister at a Freedman's church and Martha taught school classes for Black children in her yard.

Martha and her family eventually left Texas in 1877. They lived in various places over the next few decades. Martha taught at schools and worked for women's rights on various Indian reservations in Arkansas and Oklahoma. Martha Goodwin Tunstall died of tuberculosis in Bluejacket, in Oklahoma Indian Territory, on April 16, 1911.