

AMERICAN PROFILES

(continued)

**CHAPTER
13**

Thaddeus Stevens

The Radical Republicans of Congress had a no more outspoken partisan for taking harsh measures against the South than their leader, Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania. Southern people, he said, "must eat the fruit of foul rebellion" before being returned to the Union fold, and no one worked harder to see that they did than Stevens.

As you read the profile below, look for reasons why Thaddeus Stevens might have developed the ideas and policies that he did.

Thaddeus Stevens's face—grim, stern, and uncompromising—reflected a great deal about the man. He was born into the hardscrabble life of the Vermont frontier in 1792. Death or desertion deprived Stevens and his three brothers of their father, and their impoverished mother had to struggle to raise the boys herself. His mother trained him at an early age to work hard and develop an independent outlook.

In spite of poverty and ill health, young Stevens was able to attend Dartmouth College, where he showed a strong dramatic streak. After graduating from Dartmouth, he became a lawyer and opened an office in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, near the Maryland border. This proximity to the South opened his eyes to the injustices of slavery and to the plight of fugitive slaves. His New England upbringing had already given him a distaste for slavery. Now he became fiercely opposed to it, denouncing it as "a curse, a shame, and a crime." Elected to the U.S. Congress in 1848, he denounced the Compromise of 1850 in fiery rhetoric and fought against passage of the Fugitive Slave Act.

After the Civil War began, Stevens repeatedly urged President Lincoln to take sterner measures against southerners, including wholesale arrests, confiscation of land, and capital punishment. His attitude toward southerners was hardened even

more after Confederate troops invading Pennsylvania burned down his buildings and confiscated his livestock. After the war, when Lincoln proposed his plan for Reconstruction, Stevens railed against what he considered its mildness toward the South. He had other ideas: "The whole fabric of southern society *must* be changed," he cried.

After Lincoln's assassination, President Johnson, in pursuing Lincoln's policies, soon incurred the wrath of Thaddeus Stevens. He was instrumental in persuading Congress to veto Johnson's measures. Then, as a final blow to Johnson, Stevens helped to write the articles of impeachment against the beleaguered President and to prosecute Johnson's trial before the Senate. There, Stevens referred to Johnson as "this offspring of assassination."

By the time of the trial, Stevens was old, weary, and in ill health. The President's acquittal embittered him and seemed to cause him to sink still further. He died a few months later and was buried in a small Pennsylvania graveyard, the only one he could find that did not discriminate against African Americans. Engraved on his tombstone is an inscription he wrote himself, which says in part: "I have chosen this [place], that I might illustrate in my death the principles which I advocated through a long life—Equality of Man before his Creator."

Questions to Think About

1. Why was Thaddeus Stevens a natural leader for the Radical Republicans?
2. In what ways did he show his contempt for President Andrew Johnson?
3. **Recognizing Bias** How would you describe Stevens's attitude toward the South?