

THE LOCKE SOCIETY

LIFE, LIBERTY & EDUCATION



Unit

Topic

Reconstruction

First Black Americans in Congress

Lesson Plan

Aim

To identify the struggles and achievements of the first black Americans in Congress during the Reconstruction Era by creating a museum exhibit to feature them.

Rationale

After the Civil War ended, Republicans were determined to secure the rights of the freedmen. The passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments were landmark accomplishments in the fight for equal opportunity for African-Americans. Although the end of the Reconstruction Era would see severe challenges and limitations to the rights of the freedmen, history must not forget the initial efforts of those who broke through racial barriers. The first black Americans in Congress would give hope and inspiration to many who were enduring the devastating and cruel treatment of the time. Individuals like Hiram Rhodes Revels, the first black American in Congress, bravely spoke against the harsh treatment of African-Americans, and gallantly persevered through the discrimination from Democrats who detested their presence in Congress. With patience and respect, the first black Americans in Congress courageously laid a foundation that would lead to the greater movement for civil rights and equality over the next century.

Student Learning Objectives

Students will be able to evaluate the challenges and progress of the first black Americans in Congress by identifying key moments from biographies.

Students will be able to design a museum exhibit featuring the first black Americans in Congress by creating a floor plan, identifying themes, and organizing information in a logical manner.

Civics Connection

- Why is this topic one of particular importance for participation in a democratic society?
- How can one change, strengthen, or improve upon a social, political, or economic standing?
- How have people in power affected political, social, and economic developments regarding the freedom and protection of their people?

*See the *Civics Connection Through Questioning* guide in *Civics* for more ideas.



Vocabulary

Reconstruction	Senate	13 th , 14 th , and 15 th Amendments
Hiram Rhodes Revels	House of Representatives	

Materials and Resources

1. Text [website]: *First Black Americans in Congress*
Source: <https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Black-Americans-in-Congress/>
2. Text: *Background Notes: First Black Americans in Congress*
3. Handout: Museum Exhibit Floor Plan [blank and model copies]
4. Handouts: Museum Exhibit Planners 1 and 2 [blank and model copies]
5. Handout: Museum Exhibit Planner for Rooms [blank and model copies]

Procedure

Do Now:

Interpret the quote by Frederick Douglass. Explain whether or you agree or disagree.

“The ballot is the only safety.” – Frederick Douglass

<http://www.frederick-douglass-heritage.org/quotes/>

Lesson:

The teacher will review the background notes on the first black Americans in Congress. Next, the teacher will model how to complete the museum exhibit activity. The model includes at least one sample for each page including the museum exhibit floor plan and multiple planners to organize information. While the teacher is modeling the task, it is important to discuss Hiram Rhodes Revels as he is being taught through the model. (Students may feature Hiram Rhodes Revels in their own exhibit.)

Independent/Collaborative Work:

Part 1: Students will work in groups of four to design the museum exhibit featuring the first black Americans in Congress. The teacher may suggest that students divide roles after establishing the theme and/or people who will be featured in the exhibit. Students should have access to the Internet for research and they should primarily use the following link: [41st Congress](#) (You may use the following link for additional resources: <https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Black-Americans-in-Congress/>)

Part 2: Students will create a large display of the museum exhibit on poster-board or using a digital resource if available, to prepare for sharing their creation with their classmates.

Share:

Students will view each other’s exhibits by conducting a gallery walk or viewing presentations. Students should provide feedback to each group including what was done well and what could be improved upon.

Close:

How did the first black Americans in Congress test the strength and endurance of the founding principles of America?



Modifications

- The teacher may assign themes and/or people to groups.
- If students do not have Internet access, teachers should print out biographies that may be used for students to reference or use the school library.
- The teacher may use more or less planning sheets if necessary.
- The teacher may include a rubric to grade the presentation if being used as an assessment.

Extension

Students should research and write about black Americans in Congress today. Students should compare and contrast what black Americans fought for since the Reconstruction including how goals have changed and why.

Notes

**Use discretion for activities according to what is appropriate for your class.*



Background Notes: First Black Americans in Congress

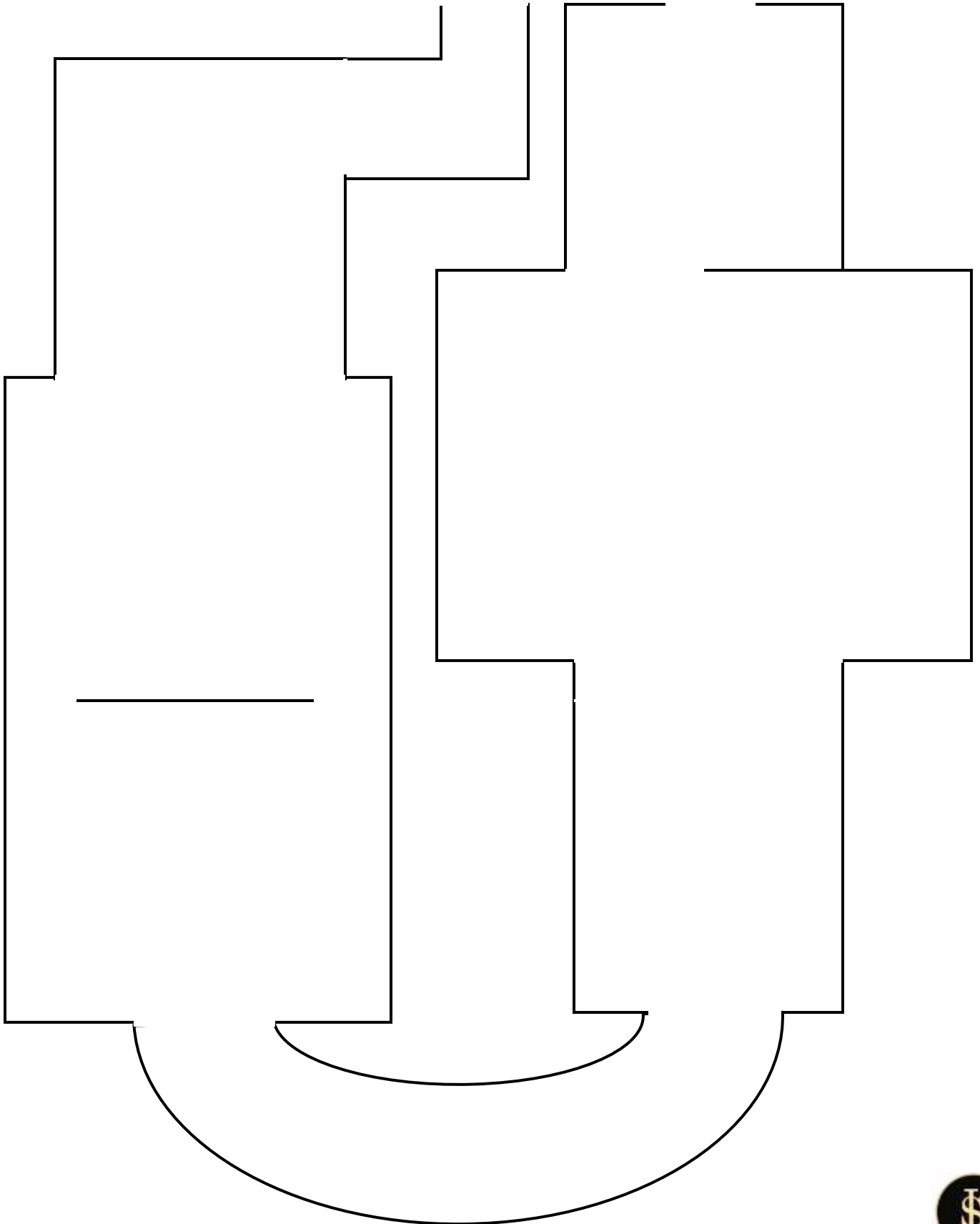
- Dates and events to remember:
 - The Civil War ended on April 9, 1865.
 - The 13th Amendment, abolishing slavery, was ratified in 1865.
 - The 14th Amendment, granting citizenship to “all persons born or naturalized in the United States,” was ratified in 1868.
 - The 15th Amendment, granting men the right to vote regardless of race, was ratified in February of 1870.
 - Reconstruction formally ended in 1877.
- Seventeen African-American Representatives, all Republicans elected from southern states, served in Congress between 1870 to 1887. Eight of the seventeen Members had suffered under slavery. Other Members had been free before the war.
- Although the legislative strategies differed between the black Members, their agendas included three main similar goals for black Americans: they wanted to provide education, ensure that political rights could be exercised, and expand opportunities to allow for economic independence.
- While these black Members of Congress advanced the aspirations of the African-American community by achieving political representation, their goal to accomplish more was limited. Three key constitutional amendments were passed before any of the black Members served in Congress. They were often sidelined and excluded from participation in influential assignments. Still, Members spoke out about the mistreatment of the freedmen from white Southerners.
- Soon after Reconstruction formally ended, black Americans in the South faced severe discrimination in a segregated society, and a near end to their political participation.
- There was an 85-year absence of African-American Senators until 1966 when Republican Edward W. Brooke from Massachusetts won a seat. (During the 85-year absence of African-American Senators, black Americans were still elected to the House mostly from northern states.)

Sources:

<https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Historical-Essays/Introduction/Reconstruction-Generation/>
<https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Historical-Data/Black-American-Representatives-and-Senators-by-Congress/>



Museum Exhibit Floor Plan



Museum Exhibit Planner 1

1. Will your exhibit feature one individual, multiple people, and/or a particular theme? List below.

2. How many different topics will you be covering? (i.e. education, reforms, civil rights)

3. What is your connection to the present?



Museum Exhibit Planner 2

Directions: Label each room on the floor plan with a number. Write down the number for the room in first column. Fill in the outline with brief notes for an overview each room.

Rm.	Person/Theme	Information Presented	Source

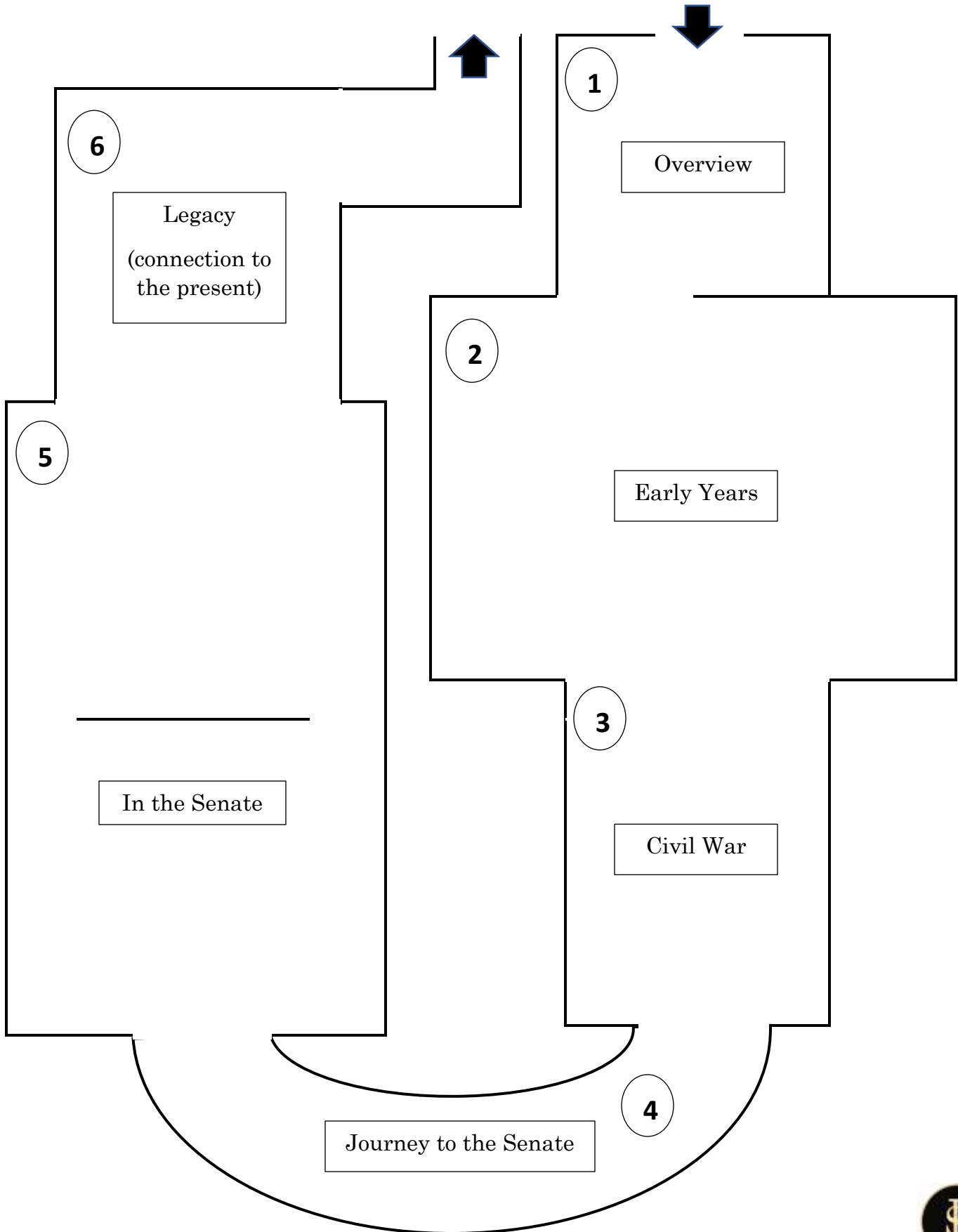


Museum Exhibit Planner: Room # _____

Title:	
Theme/People:	
Images:	
Artifacts:	
Audio:	
Text written on plaques: *Note if text accompanies an artifact/image.	



Museum Exhibit Floor Plan [MODEL]



Museum Exhibit Planner 1 [MODEL]

1. Will your exhibit feature one individual, multiple people, and/or a particular theme? List below.

Our exhibit will feature one individual: Hiram Rhodes Revels, the first black American Senator.

2. How many different topics will you be covering? (i.e. education, reforms, civil rights)

We will be covering 5 different topics:

- 1. Early Years**
- 2. Civil War**
- 3. Journey to the Senate**
- 4. In the Senate**
- 5. Legacy (connection to the present)**

3. What is your connection to the present?

Our connection to the present is Hiram Rhodes Revels' words of inspiration and peaceful, patient strategy for fighting for civil rights.



Museum Exhibit Planner 2 [MODEL]

Directions: Label each room on the floor plan with a number. Write down the number for the room in first column. Fill in the outline with brief notes for an overview each room.

Rm.	Person/Theme	Information Presented	Source
1	Overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First black American in the Senate, 1870 • Quote: “[T]he Republican party is not inflamed, as some would ... have the country believe, against the white population of the South. Its borders are wide enough for all truly loyal men to find within them some peace and repose from the din and discord of angry faction.” - Hiram Rhodes Revels 	https://history.house.gov/People/Listing/R/REVELS,-Hiram-Rhodes-(R000166)/
2	Early Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revels was born a free man on September 27, 1827 • Revels worked with his brother, Elias, as a barber in the barber shop owned by Elias who left it to Hiram to inherit when he died. • Hiram sold the barber shop and moved to Illinois where he studied to become a minister. • Revels took a job as a preacher in Missouri but was imprisoned one later. • Moved to Baltimore and became the principal of a black school. Soon after, he attended Knox College and then became the first black pastor of the Madison Street Presbyterian Church. 	https://history.house.gov/People/Listing/R/REVELS,-Hiram-Rhodes-(R000166)/



Museum Exhibit Planner: Room # 5 [MODEL]

Title:	In the Senate
Theme/People:	Hiram Rhodes Revels' highlights from his time served in the Senate.
Images:	Portrait of Hiram Rhodes Revels in Congress
Artifacts:	<i>The Fifteenth Amendment Celebrated May 19, 1870</i> created by Kelly Thomas, Lithograph from the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture
Audio:	N/A
Text written on plaques: *Note if text accompanies an artifact/image.	<p>Plaque 1: Revels was one of the first Republicans to support amnesty for former Confederates, which would restore their full citizenship. He wanted the nation to move on from the evils of the Civil War.</p> <p>Plaque 2: Revels nominated black candidate Michael Howard to the U.S. Army Military Academy at West Point. Although Howard was not allowed to attend West Point, it raised the issue of equal rights.</p> <p>Plaque 3: Revels worked to have black mechanics from Baltimore be allowed to work at the U.S. Navy Yard, which he viewed as one of his greatest accomplishments.</p>



Museum Exhibit Planner: Room # 6 [MODEL]

Title:	Legacy
Theme/People:	Hiram Rhodes Revels' lasting impact and how it relates to present day.
Images:	Hiram Rhodes Revels portrait Civil Rights Movement marches
Artifacts:	N/A
Audio:	Audio of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech
Text written on plaques: *Note if text accompanies an artifact/image.	<p>Plaque 1: Ninety years before Rosa Parks' brave protest on the bus, Revels refused to leave his seat on a train. During on of his trips to Kansas, in 1865, he and his family were asked to leave the first-class car of a train, and instead were asked to sit in the smoking car. Revels protested and told the conductor that the language and atmosphere of the smoking car was not appropriate for his wife and children. In the end, the conductor agreed to allow Revels and his family to sit in the first-class car.</p> <p>Quote: "We are in the midst of an exciting canvass.... I am working very hard in politics as well as in other matters. We are determined that Mississippi shall be settled on a basis of justice and political and legal equality." -Hiram Rhodes Revels</p>

