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### *A Man of Conscience*

Had it not been for the Civil War, Adelbert Ames would probably never have lived in Mississippi. Born in Maine, he was at the United States Military Academy at West Point when the war began. He showed such bravery at the first Battle of Bull Run that he was given the Congressional Medal of Honor. Serving throughout the war, he reached the rank of major general.

When the Reconstruction Acts were passed in 1867, Ames was assigned to duty in Mississippi. After the 1868 Constitution was defeated, President Grant appointed him military governor. In January 1870, after the constitution had passed and civilian control was restored, the state legislature elected him United States senator from Mississippi.

Ames did not stay long in Washington, however. Within two years he was back in Mississippi, campaigning for governor against James L. Alcorn. In a letter many years later, Ames explained: "It seemed to me that I had a Mission with a large M. Because of my course as Military Governor, the colored men of the State had confidence in me and I was convinced that I could help to guide them."

Ames won, but his administration was shaken by increasing violence. He desperately called for aid from Grant, saying, "I cannot escape the conscientious discharge of my duty toward a class of American citizens whose only crime consists in their color."

The federal government did not restore order, the Republicans lost the election of 1875, and the new legislature brought impeachment charges against Governor Ames. The fight was over. Ames resigned and left the state at the age of 40, never to return.

He was bitterly denounced. One man wrote: "He is regarded as the most wicked and infamous man that ever lived in the state." But years later, John M. Stone, who presided over Ames's impeachment trial and replaced him as governor, wrote: "I regard him, and did at the time, personally, as a man of integrity and refinement." Both Ames and his opponents came to agree that his major difficulty was caused by his sense of duty to the law and to civil rights for all. As Ames put it, years later: "Even now I can not see how I could have conducted affairs of the state to secure the approval of the white people. Reconstruction laws which I was bound to execute demanded that the colored people be given equal political rights."

Ames lived to the age of 97, dying in New England in 1933.

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