The Liberal Republican Party of the United States was a political party that was organized in Cincinnati in May 1872, to oppose the reelection of President Ulysses S. Grant and his Radical Republican supporters in the presidential election of 1872. The Liberal Republican party's candidate was Horace Greeley, longtime publisher of the New York Tribune. Following his nomination by the Liberal Republicans, Greeley was also nominated by the Democratic Party. Greeley was seen as an oddball reformer with no government experience and a long record of vehement attacks against the very Democrats he now called on for support. Greeley was defeated, receiving approximately 43% of the popular vote, and winning only in the states of Texas, Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia, and Maryland. Grant received 286 of the 352 electoral college votes.

The Liberal Republican Party vanished immediately after the election. However, historians suggest that, by loosening the allegiance of liberal elements to the Republican Party, the Liberal Republicans made it possible for many of these leaders to move to the Democratic Party. The others returned to the GOP.

History of the party

The party began in Missouri in 1870 under the leadership of Carl Schurz and spread nationwide.[1] It had strong support from powerful Republican newspaper editors such as Murat Halstead of the Cincinnati Commercial, Horace White of the Chicago Tribune, Henry Watterson of the Louisville Courier-Journal, Samuel Bowles of the Springfield Republican and especially Whitelaw Reid and Horace Greeley of the New York Tribune.[2]

The Liberal Republicans thought that the Grant Administration, and the president personally, were fully corrupt. More important they thought that the goals of Reconstruction had been achieved. These goals were first the destruction of slavery and second the destruction of Confederate nationalism. With these goals achieved the tenets of republicanism demanded that federal military troops be removed from the South, where they were propping up allegedly corrupt Republican regimes. Many of the original founders of the Republican party and leaders of the Civil War joined the movement, including its nominee Horace Greeley, Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, Lyman Trumbull of Illinois, Cassius Marcellus Clay of Kentucky, and Charles Francis Adams of Massachusetts. The party platform demanded "the
immediate and absolute removal of all disabilities imposed on account of the rebellion” and local self-government for the southern states. It regarded "a thorough reform of the civil service as one of the most pressing necessities of the hour."[3]

The Liberal Republicans believed in civil and political rights for African-Americans and argued that goal had been achieved. Now, they said, it was time for "amnesty", which meant restoring the right to vote and hold office to ex-Confederates.[4] A key Radical goal was to oust the ex-Confederates from power as a worthwhile goal for Reconstruction.

The Liberal Republican Party fused with the Democratic Party in all states except for Louisiana and Texas. In many states, such as Ohio, the two parties nominated half of the slate of candidates. Some Democrats supported Charles O'Conor, who ran for President on the Straight-Out Democratic ticket. However, in the state elections held in the fall prior to the presidential election, the LR-D fusion tickets were easily defeated by the Republicans. In the presidential election, Greeley won six states.[5]

Greeley died on November 29, 1872, before the presidential electors met on December 4 to cast the electoral votes. The Greeley electors were not able to coordinate their votes before meeting, but their action made no difference in the face of Grant's electoral college landslide.[6]

Although the Liberal Republican Party did not survive Greeley's death, several of its reforms materialized in the following decade. Reform Republicans accomplished the nomination and then election of Rutherford B. Hayes in 1876, who brought Reconstruction to an end and removed some of the more offensive of Grant's appointments. The Liberal Republican call for civil service reform was passed during the administration of President Chester Arthur.[7]

**Interpretations**

Downey (1967) argues Greeley was nominated as a result of a crass political bargain imposed against the will of a convention that really wanted Charles Francis Adams. Men like Schurz supported Adams, but were not inexperienced political idealists, and professional politicians neither acted nor voted as a bloc, particularly after the collapse of a boom for David Davis, a collapse engineered by a group of leading reformist Republican editors. The shift of particular votes to Greeley was not decisive, but the feeling of the delegates that Adams could not win support among Irish workers, the Western masses, or Democratic voters.[8]

Lunde (1978) argues Grant supporters hailed the Civil War as a great triumph which had bound the United States into a united nation, linked not only by sentiment but by rapidly increasing networks of railroads. The Democrats and their Liberal Republican allies feared the war was a tragedy, recoiled against centralization, and sought to recapture the purity of prewar days through reconciliation and respect for the autonomy of the states. Greeley's benevolent image of nationalism was defeated by the centralizing, "blood and iron" concept of Grant.[9]

McPherson (1972) argues that three-quarters of ex-abolitionists favored Grant, although such antislavery Republicans as Charles Francis Adams, Carl Schurz, and Charles Sumner were key supporters of Greeley. Focused
on the welfare of the freedmen, abolitionists were appalled by Greeley's formula for cooperation with "better class" southern whites by granting amnesty to all Confederates and adopting a hands-off policy toward the South. They supported Grant in the belief that his southern policy promised the best protection for the African Americans. Most abolitionists believed that, moral suasion having failed earlier, true equality could be achieved only through relentless law enforcement.\[10\]

Slap (2006) redeems the reputation of the Liberal Republicans from allegations of opportunism (as presented by Ari Hoogenboom), of elitism (as presented by John G. Sproat), and racism as presented by the Neoabolitionists. He joins Heather Cox Richardson and David Quigley in concluding that Reconstruction ended not because of politicized violence in the South, but because of the Northern decision that the war goals had been achieved and it would thwart republican ideals to continue Army rule of the South.

**Famous Liberal Republicans**

- Charles Francis Adams, Sr., former congressman and ambassador, son of President John Quincy Adams.
- B. Gratz Brown, a governor of Missouri, vice-presidential candidate in the election of 1872.
- Salmon P. Chase, Chief Justice of the United States, former U.S. Senator from Ohio and treasury secretary.
- David Davis, U.S. Supreme Court justice, later senator from Illinois.
- Reuben Fenton, while U.S. Senator from New York
- Horace Greeley, newspaper editor, presidential candidate in the election of 1872.
- Carl Schurz, former ambassador, Civil War general, power-broker, and senator from Missouri.
- Charles Sumner, senator from Massachusetts, anti-slavery advocate
- Nathaniel P. Banks, chairman of the house Committee on Foreign Affairs and former Speaker.
- George Washington Julian, congressman from Indiana, women's suffrage advocate

**Further reading**

- Ross, Earle Dudley. *The Liberal Republican Movement* (1910) full text online\[15\]
• Slap, Andrew L. *The Doom of Reconstruction: The Liberal Republicans in the Civil War Era* (Fordham University Press, 2006) online edition[16], the standard scholarly history
• Van Deusen, Glyndon G. *Horace Greeley, Nineteenth-Century Crusader* (1953) online edition[17]

**References**

[3] Ross (1910)
[5] Ross (1910)
[6] Most Greeley electors (42 of 66) voted for Thomas A. Hendricks for President. Greeley electors who were Liberal Republicans cast 18 electoral votes for B. Gratz Brown (8 in Missouri, 6 in Georgia, and 4 in Kentucky). Two Greeley electors voted for Charles Jenkins, one for David Davis, and three electors (in Georgia) voted for Greeley, even though he had died. Congress refused to count the three electoral votes cast for Greeley.
[7] Ross (1910)
[15] http://books.google.com/books?id=ZX2q-h-xYFcC&pg=PA202&dq=%22liberal+republicans%22+%22consent%22&lr=&num=100&as_brr=0&ei=su24SKSzAY32sgPo8pDFDg#PPA16,M1
[16] http://www.questia.com/read/115916949?title=The%20Doom%20of%20Reconstruction%3A%20The%20Liberal%20Republicans%20in%20the%20Civil%20War%20Era

**External links**

• Proceedings of the Liberal Republican Convention, in Cincinnati, May 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, 1872 (http://books.google.com/books?id=j3k0AAAAAIAAJ)
• Overview of Liberal Republican National Convention, 1872 (http://www.ourcampaigns.com/RaceDetail.html?RaceID=58521)
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