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| **Worksheet A: Robert Elliott Biography Analysis** | | |
|  | Discussion Questions – Jot down your thoughts | What questions/observations do you have? |
| Born 1842 in Liverpool, England. Educated in British public schools.  Skilled as a typesetter, and served in British Navy. | *Why might this background be relevant to his later emergence as a American black leader?* |  |
| By 1867, was living in Charleston, South Carolina as an associate editor for the *South Carolina Leader,* a freedmen’s newspaper, and emerged as a leader at South Carolina state constitutional convention in 1868. | *How might this background have allowed him to emerge as a black leader? What key skills did he have?* |  |
| Later in 1868, was elected to Barnwell County, SC Board of Commissioners (only black member) and then to SC State House of Representatives. | *What challenges do you think he faced as the only, and then one of the only, black men in these positions? Were there any advantages?* |  |
| Admitted to SC Bar (given license to practice law in SC) in 1868 (self-studied). | *What words would you use to describe Elliott knowing about this accomplishment?* |  |
| In 1870, was Republican nominee for U.S. House of Representatives in the district seat once held by Representative Preston Brooks (committed caning assault on Senator Charles Sumner in 1856). Won and was sworn into 42nd Congress in 1871. | *What is ironic about this fact?* |  |
| Was darker-skinned than the other African-American representatives. “I shall never forget [my first day in Congress],” Elliott later recalled. “I found myself the center of attraction. Everything was still.” (Office of History). | *Why might his skin color be significant? What feelings might he have had about entering the U.S. Congress? How do you interpret the quotation about his first day in Congress?* |  |
| Served on Committee on Education and Labor. Active in *challenging* the Amnesty Bill (to re-establish full political rights of former Confederates) that ultimately passed. He also was vocal in *supporting* the Ku Klux Klan Bill (designed to stop terrorist activities of this group), which also ultimately passed. | *Given his bio, how would he feel about being appointed to this committee? Why would he have taken the stances he did on each bill?* |  |
| Given his political activism at this time, felt his life was in danger and he gave instructions to his wife in case of his death. | *Knowing what you know about him so far and reflecting on this fact, what three adjectives/phrases would you use to describe Elliott?* |  |
| Reelected in 1872 with 93% of the vote. Helped pass Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner’s Civil Rights Bill (passed as the Civil Rights Act of 1875) focused on preventing discrimination on public transportation, and in public accommodations and schools. Was opposed by Southern Democrats who argued that federal government had no constitutional authority to enforce civil rights. | *Think about Elliott living in Washington and working in Congress. What specific personal experiences can you imagine he had that would have been altered by passage of this Bill?* |  |
| Delivered eulogy for Senator Sumner in Boston’s Faneuil Hall in March 1874. | *What are some of the connections to Sumner that might have resulted in being chosen for this honor?* |  |
| Increasingly frustrated with corruption in SC Republican Party that was allowing Democrat Party to gain inroads. Resigned from U.S. House of Representatives in 1874. Won seat in SC State Assembly, later serving as state attorney general. | *Why could corruption in his party cause him to decide to resign?* |  |
| Lost political position in Bargain of 1877 when Reconstruction collapsed. Remained politically active and struggled to make a living with his law practice until his death, in poverty, in in 1884. | *What does this last piece of his biography imply about the life of an educated, politically active black American in SC after Reconstruction?* |  |