

GOP: On the Right Side of History



First African-American Governor

The son of a white Southern planter and a former slave, Pinckney Benton Stewart “P. B. S.” Pinchback became the first African-American to serve as governor of any American state, during a brief Reconstruction-era tenure as Louisiana’s chief executive.

Prior to his political career, he served as one of the Union Army’s few commissioned officers of African descent during the Civil War. Pinchback in the spring of 1867 set the stage for a new state constitutional convention; as the leader of the Fourth Ward Republican Club, Pinchback gained his first meaningful office as a delegate to the convention, where he first revealed in an open forum his preferences for centrist pragmatism over ideological idealism.

Pinchback won election as a Louisiana state senator in 1868. When the lieutenant governor, Oscar Dunn, died in office in 1871, Pinchback – who was president of the state Senate at the time – succeeded him. The next year the governor, Henry Clay Warmoth, was impeached with barely over a month left in his term, and as the acting lieutenant governor Pinchback then succeeded him and served out the rest of Warmoth’s term as Louisiana governor.

For the entire 35 days Pinchback served as governor he received hate mail and threats on his life. The country would not have its second African-American governor until Douglas Wilder was elected governor of Virginia in 1990.

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