

Union victory ends slavery, but fight goes on and on

RECONSTRUCTION is seeking to transform America after the Union victory in the Civil War brought an end to slavery, *writes our politics editor, February 3, 1870.* Defeated Confederate states have been placed under U.S. military control, and millions of newly freed African-Americans are being promised basic human rights.

Southern “slave” states are being readmitted to the Union after consenting to the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution. Taken together, they abolish slavery, provide citizens equal protection under the law, and give adult males the vote, whatever their “race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”

It is a triumph for campaigners such as Charles Sumner (pictured below), a U.S. Senator from Massachusetts. Before the war, Sumner became famous for making an anti-slavery speech that led a pro-slavery congressman to beat him until he was unconscious.

Tragically, U.S. President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, and did not live to see the results of Reconstruction.

Not all Massachusetts abolitionists agree on where the movement goes from here. With the battle for emancipation finally won, William Lloyd Garrison wants to disband the American Anti-Slavery Society he cofounded. For others, the struggle goes on. The vote has been extended to newly freed men, but not to women. In Massachusetts, segregated schools were banned in 1855, but many remain white or African-American.

At a Boston meeting, leading abolitionist Frederick Douglass previously warned of a “malignant spirit” in the pro-slavery South that will attempt to reverse gains made by the Union victory.

