C. C. Antoine

The free-born Caesar Carpetier Antoine, (1836 - 1921) was one of three African American Republicans who served as Lieutenant Governor of Louisiana during the era of Reconstruction (1872-1876). In addition, Antoine was a soldier, businessman, and editor.

Antoine was born in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1836, the son of a veteran of the Battle of New Orleans, which followed the War of 1812. His mother was a native of the West Indies and the daughter of an African chief.

Antoine spent his childhood in New Orleans and attended private schools there. He was fluent in French and English. After graduating he entered one of the few occupations open to Negroes in the antebellum South—the barer trade. Antoine, a barber, put up his shutters and immediately exchanged his scissors and comb for sword and revolver. After the federal troops captured Baton Rouge in the winter of 1862, he sought black soldiers, and in forty-eight hours he raised a company of sixty-day men. He organized a colored company known subsequently as Company I, 7th Louisiana Colored Regiment (Corps d’Afrique). As captain of the company, he served in the Brashear City [now Morgan City] area where Union Brigadier General Godfrey Weitzel had built an entrenchment to block Confederate entry to Baton Rouge or New Orleans. After the fighting ended, he then moved to Shreveport, Louisiana, the seat of Caddo Parish, where he established a family grocery business, but due to enfranchisement and reconstruction he was naturally drawn into politics. When the convention framed the present constitution of Louisiana he exerted himself in vain to induce the old citizens of Caddo to accept the new condition of affairs and permit the colored people to elect them as delegates to that convention. He was elected a delegate to the Louisiana Constitutional Convention of 1867-1868, one of the two southern states (South Carolina was the other) that had a majority of Negroes. At the convention, Antoine advocated tax reforms, an extensive Bill of Rights, and application to the United States Congress for extension of the Freedmen's Bureau (1865-1872).

In the first legislative session after the Constitution was adopted, Antoine served as a member of the Louisiana State Senate of Caddo Parish from 1868-1872 and was assigned to the committees on (1) commerce and manufacturers and (2) education. He was a strong proponent of emerging public education. He led in the fight for state support of education. In 1875, he was appointed to the School Board of Caddo Parish.

Perhaps his biggest triumph in politics was his election as Lieutenant Governor of Louisiana in (1872-1876) on the Republican ticket headed by William Pitt Kellogg, and considered Carpetbaggers. He holds the distinction of being one of three Negroes elected to this position in Louisiana (the two other blacks, Oscar J. Dunn and P.B.S. Pinchback), respectively, preceded Antoine as Lieutenant Governor. The Republicans re-nominated

---

1 Freedmen's Bureau - The Freedmen's Bureau, formally known as the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, was an agency of the United States Department of War to established in 1863 by Congress to help millions of former black slaves and poor whites in the South in the aftermath of the Civil War. The Freedmen's Bureau provided food, housing and medical aid, established schools and offered legal assistance. It also attempted to settle former slaves on land confiscated or abandoned during the war. However, the bureau was prevented from fully carrying out its programs due to a shortage of funds and personnel, along with the politics of race and Reconstruction.

2 Oscar J. Dunn - was one of three African Americans who served as a Republican Lieutenant Governor of Louisiana during the era of Reconstruction. In 1868, Dunn became the first elected black lieutenant governor of a United States state. He ran on the ticket headed by Henry Clay Warmoth, formerly of Illinois. After Dunn died in office, then-state Senator P. B. S. Pinchback, another black Republican, became lieutenant governor and thereafter governor for a 34-day interim period.

3 Pinckney B. S. Pinchback - was an American publisher and politician, a Union Army officer, and the first African American to become governor of a state of the United States. A Republican, Pinchback served as the 24th Governor of Louisiana from December 9, 1872, to January 13, 1873. He was one of the most prominent African-American officeholders during the Reconstruction Era.

Pinchback remained in New Orleans after the Civil War, becoming active in Republican politics. He won election to the Louisiana State Senate in 1868 and became the president pro tempore of the state senate. He became the acting Lieutenant Governor of Louisiana upon the death of Oscar Dunn in 1871 and briefly served as Governor of Louisiana after
Antoine for a second term in 1876 on a ticket headed by Stephen B. Packard as the gubernatorial choice. Packard and Antoine, however, were defeated by the Democratic "Redeemer" ticket headed by former Confederate States of America Brigadier General Francis T. Nicholls. In his capacity as second officer of the State of Louisiana, Lieutenant-Governor Antoine secured the admiration and confidence of his race and the respect of the whites. His good qualities are acknowledged even by his political opponents.

During Reconstruction Antoine invested in railroad and lottery stocks and raised racehorses. In 1880, he became president of the Cosmopolitan Life Insurance Company. He also joined Pinchback as a co-partner in a cotton factorage and he edited the semiweekly New Orleans Louisiana from December 25, 1870 to April 27, 1872. Other businesses in New Orleans were also backed or invested in by Antoine.

Little is known about Antoine after 1887 except he was vice president of the New Orleans Comite’ des Citoyens, including Rodolphe L. Desdunes, of Colored Citizens, which was formed in 1890 to wage a legal battle against racial discrimination. The committee collected more than $2,000 to challenge the constitutionality of the 1890 Jim Crow compulsory segregation law. The committee engaged Homer Plessy to test the public accommodations provision of the Louisiana law, an action which led to the Plessy v. Ferguson decision by the United States Supreme Court which affirmed the legality of "separate-but-equal" facilities. Antoine’s committee also failed in an attempt to have the state law forbidding racial intermarriage declared unconstitutional.

Before he died in September 1921, he purchased a small plantation in Caddo Parish and owned several city lots. He died in Shreveport, Louisiana and is buried there.


Henry C. Warmoth was suspended from office. African Americans were increasingly disenfranchised after the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and Pinchback would be the only African American to serve as Governor of a U.S. state until 1990. After the contested 1872 Louisiana gubernatorial election, Republican legislators elected Pinchback to the United States Senate. Due to the controversy over the 1872 elections, Pinchback was never seated in Congress.

Pinchback served as a delegate to the 1879 Louisiana constitutional convention, where he helped gain support for the founding of Southern University. He served as the surveyor of customs of New Orleans from 1882 to 1885 and later helped challenge the segregation of Louisiana’s public transportation system, leading to the Supreme Court case of Plessy v. Ferguson. He moved to Washington, D.C. in 1892 and died in that city in 1921.

Rodolphe L. Desdunes -- was a civil rights activist, poet, historian, journalist, and customs officer primarily active in New Orleans, Louisiana. Later in life he moved to Omaha, Nebraska. In Louisiana he was a militiaman involved in the Battle of Liberty Place. Later, he was a member of L’Union Louisianais and wrote for the weekly of the same name. He also wrote for the daily paper, the Crusader, and taught at the Couvent School in New Orleans. In 1890, he was a founder of the Comité des Citoyens which fought the 1890 Separate Car Act through legal challenges, leading to the US Supreme Court Case, Plessy vs Ferguson. He also wrote an important French-language history of Creoles in America called Nos Hommes et Notre Histoire, the first such book written in French by a member of the Louisiana Creole Community.

Courtesy of: Archives and Manuscripts Department/John B. Cade Library/Southern University and A&M College/Baton Rouge, LA 70813.