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## November Turmoil

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# November Turmoil

## Abstract

November meant turmoil. It meant upheaval. It meant confusion. Americans had tried to speak in a clear voice, but they were about split down the center. So divided was the nation, there was no clear winner. The Democrats seized the population vote; the Electoral College fell firmly on the Republican side. The very future of the republican democracy hung in the balance. [*excerpt*]

## Keywords

presidential election, Rutherford B. Hayes, Adams County, reconstruction, racial violence

## Disciplines

Political History | United States History

## Comments

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# November turmoil

November meant turmoil. It meant upheaval. It meant confusion. Americans had tried to speak in a clear voice, but they were about split down the center. So divided was the nation, there was no clear winner. The Democrats seized the popular vote; the Electoral College fell firmly on the Republican side. The very future of republican democracy hung in the balance.

The issues were at once keenly simple and stunningly complex. Where was America headed? Would it be a nation defined by a greatness it once had, just a few decades before? Or would it step into a different, new greatness? The election was fundamentally a referendum on the future of the country.

Americans let it be known loud and clear they weren't exactly sure. Some knew their nation was headed in a wrong direction. It did not look like the America they knew. Shifting social agendas upended the balance of power. New groups, formerly docile and subservient, were now asserting their right to be part of the American tapestry.

Others saw a moment when the federal government needed to be bolstered and strengthened. They saw the temporary gains on behalf of African-Americans and immigrants starting to erode. They heard a narrative of hope being chipped away, and desperately sought to prop up the changes. The course needed to be stayed.

Many in Adams County and beyond had been looking forward to the story ending. They had been consumed by political news for months. A local newspaper even apologized. "For some weeks the paper has largely been devoted to political matters,"

## HISTORICALLY SPEAKING *John Rudy*

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the editor wrote, "The election being over, our columns hereafter will be given to general news and miscellaneous reading – a change which doubtless will be welcomed by the great mass of our readers."

But the news did not end. The story seemed interminable. The Democrats held out hope. The Republicans stuck to their guns. Congress needed to wade into the fray. At any one moment for months, it looked like one or the other might gain the White House on this technicality or that.

The future hung in the balance, literally until just before Inauguration Day. Finally, there was a president. "We have the gratification of announcing to our readers the end of the protracted presidential struggle, and the confirmation," the *Star and Sentinel* reported, of Rutherford Birchard Hayes' "title to the presidency." But the outgoing Grant administration was nervous. Hayes was inaugurated twice. There was the inauguration the readers of Gettysburg's newspapers followed, with its flags and celebration. Before that, a secret inauguration took place in the White House's Red Room, a hedged bet against insurrection.

To hold the White House for Rutherford B. Hayes, the Republicans gave up on a battle which had been ongoing for years: a struggle to make sure that the outcome of the Civil War was not overturned. They agreed to remove the final federal troops from the south, signaling the end of Reconstruction.

Over the course of the next century, violence reigned in America against African-American men, women and children. Thousands were disenfranchised, many lynched and murdered.

Although the trees of Adams County never saw men swinging from their branches (that we know of), nearby Frederick and Carroll counties saw a spate of racial violence. John H. Bigus was dragged from a Frederick County jail and murdered by a mob in 1887. The next year, John Bowen barely slipped his noose in Union Bridge when a crowd tried to preempt the court system. James Bowen was killed in 1895 outside Frederick.

In 1951, Southern novelist William Faulkner wrote, "The past is never dead. It's not even past." Historians sometimes like to retreat into the safety of microfilm readers like the ones anyone may use at the Adams County Historical Society. But the past is no retreat. We can see echoes of the present in the past and echoes of the past in the present just by grabbing another reel of microfilm from the research room wall and scrolling through the news of yesterday.

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