

**Documents for
Reconstruction : A Window Opened, Then Shut**

1. Newspaper report on celebrations at the end of the war, Charleston, SC, 1865
2. Interview with Chief Justice Chase re importance of voting, 1865
3. Petition to President asking for rights of citizenship (2x), 1865
4. An Appeal to the Nation , 1865
5. Newspaper report on a political meeting in Alabama, 1867
6. An Address to the Colored People of Louisiana, 1867
7. Comments on black legislators from The New Era, 1873-74
8. Commentary on integrated schools from New Orleans Tribune, 1867
9. Reports on integrated schools from the New National Era, 1871,1874
10. Report on conditions, 1876
11. The End of Reconstruction, 1877

From *The Trouble They Seen: Black People Tell the Story of Reconstruction* edited by Dorothy Sterling (Doubleday, © 1976)

A Jubilee of Freedom
New York *Daily Tribune*, April 4, 1865

It was a jubilee of freedom, a hosannah to their deliverers. First came the marshals and their aids, followed by a band of music; then the Twenty-first Regiment; then the clergymen of the different churches, carrying open Bibles; then an open car drawn by four white horses. In this car there were 15 colored ladies dressed in white—to represent the 15 recent Slave States. A long procession of women followed the car. Then the children—1800 in line, at least. They sang:

John Brown's body lies a moulding in the grave,
We go marching on!

This verse, however, was not nearly so popular as one which rapidly supplanted all the others, until along the mile or more of children, marching two abreast, no other sound could be heard than

We'll hang Jeff Davis on a sour apple tree!
As we go marching on!

After the children came the various trades. The fishermen, with a banner bearing an emblematical device and the words, "The Fishermen welcome you, General Saxton." Carpenters, masons, teamsters, drovers, coopers, bakers, paper-carriers, barbers, blacksmiths, wood-sawyers, painters, wheelwrights and the fire companies. The carpenters carried their planes, the masons their trowels, the teamsters their whips; the coopers their adzes. . . .

A large cart, drawn by two dilapidated horses, followed the trades. On this cart was an auctioneer's block and a black man with a bell represented a Negro trader. This man had himself been sold several times and two women and a child who sat on the block had also been knocked down at auction in Charleston.

As the cart moved along, the mock-auctioneer rang his bell and cried out: "How much am I offered for this good cook? She is an excellent cook, gentlemen. She can make four kinds of mock turtle soup—from beef, fish or fowl. Who bids?"

"Two hundred's bid! Two-fifty. Three hundred."

Who bids? Who bids?"

Women burst into tears as they saw this tableau and forgetting that it was a mimic scene, shouted wildly: "Give me back my children! Give me back my children!"

The Importance of Voting

Interview with Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase, May 1865

Chase: Suppose you *were* permitted to vote, what guarantee would the Government have that you would know how to vote?

Black man: Oh, Mr. Judge, we know who our friends are! We knows our friends.

Chase: Perhaps you in the cities may. But here is a great mass of ignorant field hands from the plantations. What is to prevent them from voting just as their old masters may tell them?

Black: We'll tell them how to vote, sir. We have means of reaching them; and they'll follow us sooner than they will their old masters or any white man. We know the difference between the Union ticket and the Rebel ticket. We know that much better than you do! Because, sir, some of our people stand behind these men at the table and hear 'em talk. We see 'em in the house and by the wayside. We *know* 'em from skin to core better than you can do till you live among 'em and see as much of 'em as we have.

Chase: What your friends at the North are afraid of, is, that your people in the interior will not know how to tell whom to vote for, and that in their bewilderment they will vote just as their old masters tell them they ought.

Black: I tell you, Mr. Judge, we can reach every colored man in the State and they would rather trust intelligent men of their own color than any white man. They'll vote the ticket we tell them is the ticket of our friends; and as fast as they can, they'll learn to read and judge for themselves.

Petitions to the President

From North Carolina Convention of African Americans New York *Daily Tribune*, May 19, 1865

Some of us are soldiers and have had the privilege of fighting for our country in this war. Since we have become Freemen, we begin to feel that we are men, and are anxious to show our countrymen that we can and will fit ourselves for the creditable discharge of the duties of citizenship. We want the privilege of voting.

From a Group of Georgia Freedmen *The Liberator*, June 30, 1865

To His Excellency, Andrew Johnson, President of the United States
Should your Excellency grant the Petition now in circulation among the White People, asking for the appointment of a Military Governor, we humbly and most earnestly pray that our interests, as well as theirs, may be regarded in your selection of the proper person for the important office. We ask not for a Black Man's Governor, nor a White Man's Governor, but for a People's Governor, who shall impartially protect the rights of all, and faithfully sustain the Union.

**An Appeal to the Nation
From Black Virginians
The Liberator, September 5, 1865**

We have no means of legally making or enforcing contracts; we have no right to testify before the courts in any case in which a white man is one of the parties to the suit; we are taxed without representation. In short, so far as legal safeguards of our rights are concerned, we are defenceless [sic] before our enemies.

We are still more unfortunately situated as regards our late masters. They have returned to their homes, with all their old pride and contempt for the Negro transformed into bitter hate for the new made freeman. In the greater number of counties of this state meetings have been held *deploring* while accepting the abolition of slavery, but going on to pledge the planters to employ no Negroes save such as were formerly owned by themselves, without a written recommendation from their late employers, thereby keeping us in a state of serfdom. They have pledged themselves, in no event, to pay their late adult slaves more than \$60 per year for their labor, out of which we are to find clothes for ourselves and families, and pay our taxes and doctors' bills. In many of the more remote districts planters are to be found who still refuse to recognize their Negroes as free, forcibly retaining the wives and children of their late escaped slaves. There are a number of cases in which a faithful performance by colored men of the labor contracted for has been met by a contemptuous refusal of the stipulated compensation.

Fellow citizens, the performance of a simple act of justice on your part will reverse all this. We ask for no expensive aid from military forces, stationed throughout the South. Give us the suffrage and you may rely upon us to secure justice for ourselves.

In conclusion, we wish to advise our colored brethren of the State and nation, that the settlement of this question is to a great extent dependent on them. Then be up and active, and everywhere let associations be formed, having for their object the agitation, discussion and enforcement of your claims to equality before the law and equal right of suffrage. Your opponents are active; be prepared and organize to resist their efforts.

“We can walk fifteen miles . . .”

Article in *The Loyal Georgian*, April 10, 1867

A meeting of colored people held at Montgomery was a remarkable one. A large room was filled with men from different parts of the state. One very intelligent, educated Negro said “I don’t want the colored people to vote for five years. Here, and for twenty miles away they’ll vote right, but farther off they will vote for ‘Mass William’ and ‘Mass John’ to get their good will.”

Whereupon an old Negro called out, “Every creature has got an instinct—the calf goes to the cow to suck, the bee to the hive. We’s a poor humble degraded people but we know our friends. We’d walk fifteen miles in wartime to find out about the battle. We can walk fifteen miles and more to find out how to vote.”

**An Address to the Colored People of Louisiana
Dr. R. I Cromwell, a black Northerner
The New Orleans *Tribune* (the first black daily paper in the
United States), April 25, 1867**

The overseer of plantations who once dared prowl around your cabins to destroy your family, the old master (so-called) now comes to tell you he is your best friend, vote for a Southerner whom you know! . . .

Will you be deceived by these old foxy fellows? Believe them not, trust them not, for if you do, we are shipwrecked. When any of that class comes to you to ask you to vote for him tell him *n o*. Don't be afraid of his not giving you employment for he is compelled to have your labor. Fulfill your contracts to the letter and vote right and we will be sure to win.

In order to vote on election day, we much comply with the laws of our country. What are these laws? Everyone must go to the register, give his name, number of his house, his ward, and street, get his certificate, put it away until election day, then take it out, go to the polls and vote for some good man. This certificate is to show you are a citizen of Louisiana and entitled to vote FOR WHOM YOU PLEASE.

Now, the persons for whom you vote have to meet in a convention to make a constitution for this State. If we do not vote in good and true men we will have slavery in another form, and a qualified suffrage, excluding colored me. We want every man to vote, hold office, sit on juries, travel on steamboats, eta in any restaurant, drink in any saloon, dine at any hotel, or educate our children at any school we choose. We demand equal privileges with the whites in all things. We much elect as many of our own race as we can, join with our Southern loyalists, choose good men from among them. But be sure to vote for no rebel or secessionist, for if you do, you are pulling the help to hang yourself with.

Reader, I hope you will cut this out and keep it until after the election. If you know of any that cannot read, read it to them. Remember, it is from one of your race who is an old abolitionist in the North who has been here in New Orleans the last four years fighting against conservatism and prejudice and traitors and shall continue to fight on till this State is reconstructed on the true basis of liberty—political, social and religious.

African Americans in Congress
Reports from *The New Era* and *The New National Era*
(published by Frederick Douglass and his sons)

December 22, 1870

Hon. Joseph H. Rainey, Representative of the First congressional District of South Carolina was sworn in and took his seat Monday last, being the first colored man who has held such a position in this country. He was born in Georgetown, D.C., in 1832 from humble parentage, his father and mother both having been slaves. Mr. Rainey's early education was limited, never having attended school in his life, but he took every opportunity to acquire a knowledge of books and improved rapidly. His parents having purchased their freedom, he removed with them to Charleston, S.C.

March 13, 1873

We have in the 43rd Congress, [eight] colored members, Pinchback, Lynch, Elliott, Rainey, Rapier, Walls, Cain, Ransier. This is an increase of three members and a decided advance as to ability. Pinchback, Rapier and Cain are all men of mind, of nerve and fidelity, who will be seconded in their labors by the experience of parliamentary life gained in the last two years by Elliott, Walls and Rainey. In the presence of such men our cause ought not to suffer.

January 2, 1873

Considering [Hiram Revels'] brief stay and his training he did well. . . . The precedent itself was something. A Negro was occupying a seat in the United States Senate—he was occupying the seat of a man who had last used it to plot against the nation's life—he was occupying it as a representative figure of Negro interest, hope and possibility; and by the blacks he was hailed with joy as the harbinger of a brighter period for the black man and the nation.

May 7, 1874

For the first time in the nation's history, a colored man, Hon. Joseph H. Rainey of South Carolina, presided over the deliberations of the House of Representatives. The earth continues to revolve on its axis.

Reports on Integrated Schools

The New Orleans *Tribune*, May 9, 1867

We do not see why the city should go to the expense of organizing twenty or thirty new schools when she already has a sufficient number. Discrimination among children on account of religion and language would certainly be better justified than a distinction based on their complexions. The idea of having schools over the doors of which will be inscribed the words “for children of fair complexion only” or “for children with blue eyes only” and of other schools set apart “for children of dark complexion” is of itself ridiculous, and brings a smile on the lips of every reader, outside the Southern States.

Even a distinction based on the occupation of parents would be better justified than a distinction on color. Yet nobody thinks of setting apart in schools children of merchants and of mechanics, of tradesmen and of laborers. It is not proposed to separate bad children from good ones. Why? Because such distinctions are against the democratic principle of American society.

The next step, therefore is to do away with the distinction of race in the public schools.

The Austin (Texas) *Reformer*, October 19, 1871

To us it is self-evident that all public institutions of learning must very soon be opened to all persons. In the grand old Commonwealth of Massachusetts people were first excited upon the question in 1849. In 1854 the legislature set this matter at rest by abolishing the separate schools. The mixed school system thus inaugurated has given universal satisfaction.

In Michigan the question was settled by the Supreme Court. In that State, the schools have been mixed but little more than a year. In Kansas where the colored population is rapidly increasing the schools are being mixed everywhere without opposition.

Throughout the greater part of the North mixed schools have been established by choice of the white people as the colored element is there politically insignificant. In the South which contains so large a proportion of colored votes we are not to expect any political party will long persist in insisting on separate schools for the races. And inasmuch as thousands of colored youth in every Southern State must forever be debarred from the benefits of the public school fund from any system of caste schools, the issue forces itself upon us.

We think we do not mistake the aims of the Republican party of Texas when we assume that it is the unalterable purpose of its leading spirits to make all the public schools free to every color.

Changing Times

Petition to South Carolina Governor Chamberlain, August 22, 1876

We the colored citizens of Laurens County feel under the necessity of appealing to you. We are under intimidation with our lives in jeopardy every day by men in the Democratic Party who are bent upon coercing us to vote for them. We can assure you, sir, that Laurens of 1876 is not Laurens of 1872. No, sir, it is not. For then a black man and the poor white man could dare to say who he would cast his ticket for, without being starved, whipped or shot to death. But now he neither dares to speak nor act without being in extreme danger. Don't think that we are unnecessarily alarmed. The threats are loud and openly proclaimed. More than that they are being put in execution almost daily. No week pass without some of our people are either whipped, chased or shot at by the night riders. . . .

The End of Reconstruction
Address to the Republicans of South Carolina by Governor
Chamberlain, April 10, 1877

Today—April 10, 1877—by order of the President whom your votes alone rescued from overwhelming defeat, the Government of the United States abandons you, and by the withdrawal of troops now protecting the State from domestic violence abandons the lawful government of the State to a struggle with insurrectionary forces too powerful to be resisted.