

## Various opinions and views on the Reconstruction

**(1) Benjamin Wade, speech in the Senate (21st April, 1862)** If there is any stain on the present Administration, it is that they have been weak enough to deal too leniently with those traitors. I know it sprung from goodness of heart; it sprung from the best of motives; but, sir, as a method of putting down this rebellion, mercy to traitors is cruelty to loyal men. Look into the seceded States, and see thousands of loyal men there coerced into their armies to run the hazard of their lives, and placed in the damnable position of perjured traitors by force of arms.

**(2) Reverend George F. Noyes, was a supporter of the Radical Republicans and on 4th July, 1862, preached a sermon to the Union Army based at Fredericksburg, Virginia.** When a man puts a knife at my throat, and I succeed in conquering and hand-cuffing him, shall I be so foolish as at once to restore him to his former position, knife and all? Let every man's own common sense answer this question. The idea with some even at the North is, that the South is to be acknowledged as an equal nation if triumphant, while, if she is subdued after the great and fearful struggle, she is at once to be invited into a front seat, and at once admitted to all her old privileges.

**(3) Benjamin Loan, letter to Charles Sumner (1st June, 1865)** Shall we acquiesce in the policy of the administration or shall we adhere to our former views that Congress alone is authorized to deal with the subject of reconstruction and that our safety and the peace of the country requires us to disenfranchise the rebels and to enfranchise the colored citizens in the revolted states and thereby confide the political power therein to local and therefore safe hands.

**(4) Andrew Johnson, letter to William Sharkey, the governor of Mississippi (June, 1865)** If you could extend the elective franchise to all persons of color who can read the Constitution of the United States in English and write their names and to all persons of color who own real estate valued at not less than two hundred and fifty dollars and pay taxes thereon, and would completely disarm the adversary. This you can do with perfect safety. And as a consequence, the radicals, who are wild upon negro franchise, will be completely foiled in their attempts to keep the Southern States from renewing their relations to the Union.

**(5) Robert E. Lee was cross-examined by Jacob Howard, the senator from Michigan, as a Congressional committee held on 17th February, 1866. Howard asked Lee if he believed the "colored population" should vote in elections.** My own opinion is that, at this time, they cannot vote intelligently, and that giving them the right of suffrage would open the door to a great deal of demagogism, and lead to embarrassments in various ways. What the future may prove, how intelligent they may become, with what eyes they may look upon the interests of the state in which they may reside, I cannot say more than you can.

**(6) Charles Nordhoff, managing editor of the New York Evening Post had a meeting with President Andrew Johnson about the planned Reconstruction Act. In a letter to his friend, William Cullen Bryant, he described the president's views on the act (2nd February, 1867)** The president grew much excited and expressed the most bitter hatred of the measure in all its parts, declaring that it was nothing but anarchy and chaos, that the people of the South, poor, quiet, unoffending, harmless, were to be trodden under foot "to protect niggers," that the States were already in the Union, that in no part of the country were life and property so safe as in the Southern States.

He is a pig headed man, with only one idea - a bitter opposition to universal suffrage and a determination to secure the political ascendancy of the old Southern leaders, who, he emphasized, must in the nature of things rule the South.

**(7) Nelson Miles, Report on the condition of black people in North Carolina (9th October, 1867)** The great foundation of all prosperity and perpetuity of our institutions and country is education. From it, as a standpoint, arises everything that is great and noble in us. The importance of the educational and moral improvement of a race heretofore entirely debarred of its benefits was early considered. The colored people are alive to their deficiencies, and with an energy and enthusiasm unbounded have seconded the efforts made, and are rapidly disenthraling themselves from the chains of ignorance. The gain during the year was 101 schools, 145 teachers, and 8,527 pupils. Much depends upon the influence and guidance given to the colored people in their new condition of life. If they are left to fall into habits of idleness and prodigality, are wronged and oppressed, their condition will become deplorable and they will be a curse to themselves and the community. On the contrary, if they are treated with justice and humanity, proper example and the advantages of education given them, the coming years will be as bright and prosperous to the unfortunate race as the past has been dark and painful.

Twenty-five thousand are reported in the schools of North Carolina. If not these, their children, under the influence of increased facilities, will become so far enlightened as to be enabled to grasp the great object of progressive Christianity and become the elevators and civilizers of Africa, and accomplish what generations have failed to achieve, sending back to the land of their forefathers from whence they were stolen, "the Word of Life," thus making the "wrath of man to praise Him." Strange indeed that events and influences so antagonistic to every principle of justice and humanity should be made the engine of power in frustrating the designs of the despoiler and in effecting the final good of the victims of the slave-ship. The problem that has so long baffled the Christian world is about to be solved in making her sons the means of her civilization and salvation.

A Christian people who have for two hundred years kept a race in bondage, deprived of the advantages of civilization and religion, owe them a debt of gratitude which it would seem ungenerous to withhold. The colored people have contributed so much to the wealth and prosperity of this country and furnished so many soldiers for its defense in its hour of danger, that the least we can do is to afford them every advantage for enlightenment and improvement here in the land in which we have placed them, and in the future, should their attention be turned to their native country, extend to them every encouragement and support which an independent and powerful nation can afford.

**(8) First Reconstruction Act (2nd March, 1867)** An act to provide for the more efficient government of the Rebel states. Whereas no legal state governments or adequate protection for life in property now exists in the Rebel states of Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Florida, Texas, and Arkansas; and whereas it is necessary that peace and good order should be enforced in said states until loyal and republican state governments can be legally established; therefore, be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, that said Rebel states shall be divided into military districts and made subject to the military authority of the United States.

**(9) Section 5 of the first Reconstruction Act states that each Rebel state was entitled to representation in Congress when it fulfilled certain conditions (2nd March, 1867)** When the people of any one of said Rebel states shall have formed a constitution of government in conformity with the Constitution of the United States in all respects, framed by a convention of delegates elected by the male citizens of said state, twenty-one years old and upward, of whatever race, color, or previous condition, who have been resident in said state for one year previous to the day of such election.

**(10) President Andrew Johnson explained why he had decided to veto the First Reconstruction Act in a speech in the House of Representatives (2nd March, 1867)** The excuse given for the bill in the preamble is admitted by the bill itself not to be real. The military rule which is established is plainly to be used, not for any purpose of order or for the prevention of crime but solely as a means of coercing the people into the adoption of principles and measures to which it is known that they are opposed and upon which they have an undeniable right to exercise their own judgment. I submit to Congress whether this measure is not in its whole character, scope, and object without precedent and without authority, in palpable conflict with the plainest provisions of the Constitution, and utterly destructive to those great principles of liberty and humanity for which our ancestors on both sides of the Atlantic have shed so much blood and expended so much treasure.

**(11) Samuel Tilden, speech on the Republican Party at a meeting of the Democratic Party in New York (11th March, 1868)** A complete and harmonious restoration of the revolted states would have been effected if the Republican Party had not proved to be totally incapable of acting in the case with any large, wise, or firm statesmanship.

A magnanimous policy would not only have completed the pacification of the country but would have effected a reconciliation between the Republican Party and the white race in the South. Every circumstance favored such a result. The Republican Party possessed all the powers of the government, and held sway over every motive of gratitude, fear, or interest. The Southern people had become thoroughly weary of the contest; more than half of them had been originally opposed to entering into it, and had done so only when nothing was left to them but to choose on which side they would fight.

All that was necessary to heal the bleeding wounds of the country and to allow its languishing industries to revive, was that the Republican Party - which boasts its great moral ideas and its philanthropy - should rise to the moral elevation of an ordinary pugilist and cease to strike its adversary after it was down.

**(12) Andrew Johnson, speech to Congress (25th December, 1868)** The attempt to place the white population under the domination of persons of color in the South has impaired, if not destroyed, the friendly relations that had previously existed between them; and mutual distrust has engendered a feeling of animosity which, leading in some instances to collision and bloodshed, has prevented the cooperation between the two races so essential to the success of industrial enterprise in the Southern States.