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The Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, October 8, 1869

"All Men Free and Equal."

THE XVTH AMENDMENT PROCLAIMED. MESSAGE TO CONGRESS.—PROCLAMATION OF THE PRESIDENT.

Proclaim Liberty throughout all the Land, to all the Inhabitants thereof.

Oh! not yet
May'st thou, O Freedom, close thy lids,
In slumber; for thine enemy never sleeps,
And thou must watch and combat, till the day
Of the new earth and heaven.

To all to whom these presents come—Greeting:

Know ye that the Congress of the United States, on or about the 27th day of February, in the year one thousand eight hundred and sixty-nine, passed a resolution in the words and figures following to wit:

A resolution proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the United States.

Resolved, By the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, two-thirds of both Houses concurring, that the following article be proposed to the Legislatures of the several States as an amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which, when ratified by three-fourths of said Legislature, shall be valid as part of the Constitution, namely:

ARTICLE 15, SECTION I. The rights of citizens of the United States to vote, shall not be denied or abridged by the United States, or by any State, on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

SECTION 2. The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

And further, That it appears from the official document on file in this Department that the Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, proposed as aforesaid, has been ratified by the Legislatures of the States of—

NORTH CAROLINA,	CONNECTICUT,	MISSOURI,
WEST VIRGINIA,	FLORIDA,	MISSISSIPPI,
MASSACHUSETTS,	ILLINOIS,	OHIO,
WISCONSIN,	INDIANA,	IOWA,
MAINE,	NEW YORK,	KANSAS,
LOUISIANA,	NEW HAMPSHIRE,	MINNESOTA,
MICHIGAN,	NEVADA,	RHODE ISLAND,
SOUTH CAROLINA,	VERMONT,	NEBRASKA,
PENNSYLVANIA,	VIRGINIA,	TEXAS.
ARKANSAS,	ALABAMA,	

In all 29 States.

And further, That the States whose Legislatures have so ratified the said proposed amendment constitute three-fourths of the whole number of States in the United States.

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And further, That it appears from an official document, on file in this Department, that the Legislature of the State of New York has since passed resolutions claiming to withdraw the said ratification of the said amendment which has been made by the Legislature of that State, and of which official notice has been filed in this Department.

And further, That it appears from an official document, on file in this Department, that the Legislature of Georgia has by resolution ratified the said proposed amendment.

Now, therefore, be it known, That I, Hamilton Fish, Secretary of State, of the United States, by virtue and in pursuance of the second section of the Act of Congress, approved the 20th day of April, in the year 1818, entitled "An act to provide for the publication of the laws of the United States and for other purposes," do hereby certify that the Amendment aforesaid has become valid to all intents and purposes as a part of the Constitution of the United States.

In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the Department of State to be affixed.

Done at the City of Washington, this thirteenth day of March, in the year of our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and seventy, and of the independence of the United States the ninety-fourth.

HAMILTON FISH

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT.

To the Senate and House of Representatives:

It is unusual to notify the two Houses of Congress by message of the promulgation, by the proclamation of the Secretary of state, of the ratification of a Constitutional Amendment. In view, however, of the vast importance of the Fifteenth Amendment of the Constitution, this day declared a part of that revered instrument, I deem a departure from the usual custom justifiable. A measure which makes at once four millions of people voters, who were heretofore declared by the highest tribunal in the land not citizens of the United States, nor eligible to become so, with the assertion that at the time of the Declaration of Independence the opinion was fixed and universal—in the civilized portion of the white race, regarded as an axiom in morals as well as in politics—that "black men had no rights which white men were bound to respect," is indeed a measure of grander importance than any other one act of the kind from the foundation of our free Government to the present time. Institutions like ours, in which all power is derived directly from the people, must depend mainly upon their intelligence, patriotism, and industry. I call the attention, therefore, of the newly-enfranchised race to the importance of their striving, in every honorable manner, to make themselves worthy of their new privilege. To the race more favored heretofore by our laws, I would say, withhold no legal privilege of advancement to the new citizen. The framers of our Constitution firmly believed that a republican form of government could not endure without intelligence and education generally diffused among the people. The Father of his Country in his Farewell Address, uses this language: "Promote, then, as a matter of primary importance, institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge. In proportion as the structure of the Government gives force to public opinion, it is essential that public opinion should be enlightened." In his first annual Message to Congress the same views were forcibly presented, and are again urged in his eighth Message.

I repeat, that the adoption of the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution completes the greatest civil change, and constitutes the most important event that has occurred since the nation came into life. The change will be beneficial in proportion to the heed that is given to the urgent recommendations of Washington. If these recommendations were important then, with a population of but a few millions, how much more important now, with a population of forty

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millions, and increasing in a rapid ratio! I would therefore call upon Congress to take all the means within their constitutional power to promote and encourage popular education throughout the country, and upon the people everywhere to see to it that all who possess and exercise political rights shall have the opportunity to acquire the knowledge which will make their share in the Government a blessing and not a danger. By such means only can the benefits contemplated by this amendment to the Constitution be secured.

U. S. GRANT.

Executive Mansion, March 30, 1870.

HAMILTON FISH, *Secretary of State of the United States.*

In all of the States engaged in the Rebellion negroes are already recognized as voters by virtue of the terms of the Reconstruction acts, and the acceptance of these by the States in question. In most of the other States, however, their exercise of the franchise has either been denied or limited by property or other qualifications. The following table shows approximately the number of voters thus added to the voting population in each of these States:

<i>States.</i>	<i>Negro Population.</i>	<i>New Voters.</i>
California.....	4,086	681
Connecticut.....	8,627	1,438
Delaware.....	21,627	3,604
Illinois.....	7,628	1,271
Indiana.....	11,428	1,805
Iowa.....	1,069	178
Kentucky.....	236,167	39,361
Maine.....	1,327	221
Maryland.....	171,131	28,522
Massachusetts.....	9,662	1,600
Michigan.....	6,799	1,333
Minnesota.....	253	93
New Hampshire.....	494	82
New-Jersey.....	25,336	4,226
New-York.....	49,005	8,167
Ohio.....	36,673	6,112
Oregon.....	128	21
Pennsylvania.....	56,849	9,475
Rhode Island.....	3,952	659
Vermont.....	709	118
Wisconsin.....	1,171	195

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