

Three documents reacting to the End of the Civil War

1. What did the war mean?
2. What does your group want now?
3. What is your feeling toward the other groups (Free Blacks, Republicans who controlled the US government, Southern Whites)
4. What does the future hold?

1. Frederick Douglass, "What the Black Man Wants" April 1865

I am for the "immediate, unconditional, and universal" enfranchisement of the black man, in every State in the Union. Without this, his liberty is a mockery; without this, you might as well almost retain the old name of slavery for his condition; for in fact, if he is not the slave of the individual master, he is the slave of society, and holds his liberty as a privilege, not as a right. He is at the mercy of the mob, and has no means of protecting himself.

...
It may be asked, "Why do you want it? Some men have got along very well without it. Women have not this right." . . . By depriving us of suffrage, you affirm our incapacity to form an intelligent judgment respecting public men and public measures; you declare before the world that we are unfit to exercise the elective franchise, and by this means lead us to undervalue ourselves, to put a low estimate upon ourselves, and to feel that we have no possibilities like other men.

...
I believe that when the tall heads of this Rebellion shall have been swept down, as they will be swept down, when the Davises and Toombses and Stephenses, and others who are leading this Rebellion shall have been blotted out, there will be this rank undergrowth of treason, . . . You will see those traitors, handing down, from sire to son, the same malignant spirit which they have manifested and which they are now exhibiting, with malicious hearts, broad blades, and bloody hands in the field, against our sons and brothers. That spirit will still remain

...
The story of our inferiority is an old dodge, as I have said; for wherever men oppress their fellows, wherever they enslave them, they will endeavor to find the needed apology for such enslavement and oppression in the character of the people oppressed and enslaved. (accessed on 10.8.18 at <http://www.frederick-douglass-heritage.org/speech-what-the-black-man-wants/>)

2. Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address, 1863

"Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, on this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived, and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives, that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they here gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth." (Accessed on 10.7.18 at http://rnc.library.cornell.edu/gettysburg/good_cause/transcript.htm)

3. Letter from Hannah Rawlings to her sister, August 1865 (Spotsylvania County, Virginia)

When I look back upon the events of the last five months, I sometimes feel as if it could not be reality, and that I have been the victim of some hideous nightmare. From the beginning of Spring, one "unmerciful disaster" after another came upon us till all culminated in the dreadful catastrophe of the 9th of April – the surrender of Lee's noble army – that army that had contested with the invader almost every foot of ground in our dear old State, and been victorious on a hundred battlefields. Could you have seen some of our soldiers as I saw them after the surrender, it would have wrung your very soul. They seemed almost heart broken. Those who had marched without faltering up to the cannon's mouth and faced death in its most horrid forms, were now completely unmanned. Tears flowed from "eyes all unused to weep," and strong men were so overcome by emotion that their trembling lips could scarcely utter a word. I felt as if I could lay my head in the dust and die!... You cannot understand how we feel about this thing. You have not watched the struggle as we have, and seen the sufferings of those you love and the insolence of the enemy. We had ministered to the wants of our soldiers, nursed them in sickness and cheered them with kind words until we felt a tenderness for the poorest one in the ranks. They were ours. We were proud of them and loved them as the champions of a just cause, and the heroes of many a dauntless deed. God bless them! I hope they may yet grow strong enough to defy those who consider themselves our masters, and to "rise again and fight for their ain cuntry."....

The feeling here against the North is intense, tho' smothered. It will never pass away. Mothers will teach their young children to abhor the slayers of their fathers and brothers, they will teach it to them from their earliest infancy. Had I sons, this is the religion that I would inculcate from the time they could lisp: "Fear God, love the South, and live to avenge her!" That is short and easily remembered.