

To understand the nature and object of the proposed amendment, it is necessary to know its history and the grounds upon which its ratification is urged.

The people of the eleven Southern States who attempted to secede from the jurisdiction of the Constitution and laws of the United States, and to establish a separate Confederacy, having utterly failed in their attempt, after four years of civil war, were compelled to lay down their arms and return to their obedience to the Constitution and laws of the United States.

The obligation of the Federal Government to restore fugitive slaves, had, in the progress of political and fanatical strife, become one of exceedingly difficult fulfillment. State legislation had virtually nullified the fugitive slave law in a majority of the free States, and the state of popular feeling against it in the others rendered it next to impossible to execute it. In the progress of the civil war, in order to get rid of the constitutional obligation, and to aid the Government and weaken the other party to the war, the Government determined to abolish slavery. It was admitted at the time that this could only be done, legally and effectually, by an amendment of the Constitution. Upon the surrender of their armies, the people of each State accepted the propositions of the President and Commander-in-Chief, as the basis of organizing their State governments in accordance with the results of the war; and in order to the performance of their Federal obligations, the State governments were established by the people in each State, and these governments, and the Constitution and laws of the United States, were recognized in every way by the people of each State as obligatory upon every person within their limits. The State Legislatures, under these constitutions, ratified the Constitutional Amendment abolishing slavery. The Executive department so proclaimed, and Congress acquiesced, and the amendment thus became a part of the Constitution of the United States. Each State duly elected its Senators and Representatives to Congress, the compliance with which Federal obligation by any of the insurgent States by the first day of January, 1863, Mr. Lincoln, by his proclamation of September, 1862, had declared, should, in the absence of strong countervailing proof, "be deemed conclusive evidence that such State, and the people thereof," were no longer in rebellion. Upon the assembling of Congress, in December, 1865, those Senators and Representatives presented their credentials, and were ready to take their seats, but were refused admission. This refusal was not based on any objection to "the elections, returns and qualifications" of the Southern Senators and Representatives, of which, by the Constitution, "each House shall be the judge," but the two Houses appointed "a Joint Committee on Reconstruction, charged to inquire into the condi-