



1 The Emancipation Proclamation

TERMS & NAMES
Emancipation
Proclamation
54th Massachusetts
Regiment

MAIN IDEA

In 1863, President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which helped to change the war's course.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The Emancipation Proclamation was an important step in ending slavery in the United States.

ONE AMERICAN'S STORY

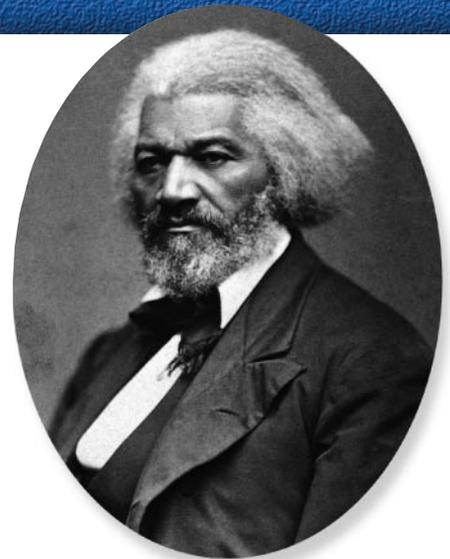
During the Civil War, abolitionists like Frederick Douglass continued their fight against slavery. Douglass urged President Lincoln to emancipate, or free, enslaved Americans. "Sound policy . . . demands the instant liberation of every slave in the rebel states," he declared.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

To fight against slaveholders, without fighting against slavery, is but a half-hearted business, and paralyzes the hands engaged in it. . . . Fire must be met with water. . . . War for the destruction of liberty [by the South] must be met with war for the destruction of slavery.

Frederick Douglass, quoted in *Battle Cry of Freedom*

Douglass pointed out that the Confederate war effort depended on slave labor. Enslaved Americans worked in Southern mines, fields, and factories. They also built forts and hauled supplies for rebel armies. For both practical and moral reasons, he said, Lincoln should free the slaves. In this section, you will learn how ending slavery became an important goal of the Civil War.



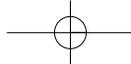
During the Civil War, Frederick Douglass offered advice to President Lincoln. He urged the president to make the conflict a war against slavery.

Calls for Emancipation

Throughout the war, abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass had been urging Lincoln to emancipate enslaved persons. Many criticized the president for being too cautious. Some even charged that Lincoln's lack of action aided the Confederate cause.

Still, Lincoln hesitated. He did not believe he had the power under the Constitution to abolish slavery where it already existed. Nor did he want to anger the four slave states that remained in the Union. He also knew that most Northern Democrats, and many Republicans, opposed emancipation.

Lincoln did not want the issue of slavery to divide the nation further than it already had. Although he disliked slavery, the president's first priority was to preserve the Union. "If I could save the Union without freeing



any slave I would do it,” he declared. “If I could save it by freeing *all* the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that.”

By the summer of 1862, however, Lincoln had decided in favor of emancipation. The war was taking a terrible toll. If freeing the slaves helped weaken the South, then he would do it. Lincoln waited, however, for a moment when he was in a position of strength. After General Lee’s forces were stopped at Antietam, Lincoln decided to act.

The Emancipation Proclamation

On January 1, 1863, Lincoln issued the **Emancipation Proclamation**, which freed all slaves in Confederate territory. The proclamation had a tremendous impact on the public. However, it freed very few slaves. Most of the slaves that Lincoln intended to liberate lived in areas distant from the Union troops that could enforce his proclamation.

Background

In September 1862, Lincoln issued an early proclamation that gave rebellious states a chance to preserve slavery by rejoining the Union.



Lincoln presents the Emancipation Proclamation to his cabinet.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

On the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, [thenceforth], and forever free.

Abraham Lincoln, from the *Emancipation Proclamation*

Why, critics charged, did Lincoln free slaves only in the South? The answer was in the Constitution. Because freeing

Southern slaves weakened the Confederacy, the proclamation could be seen as a military action. As commander-in-chief, Lincoln had this authority. Yet the Constitution did not give the president the power to free slaves within the Union. But Lincoln did ask Congress to abolish slavery gradually throughout the land.

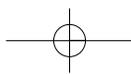
Although the Emancipation Proclamation did not free many enslaved people at the time it was issued, it was important as a symbolic measure. For the North, the Civil War was no longer a limited war whose main goal was to preserve the Union. It was a war of liberation.

Response to the Proclamation

Abolitionists were thrilled that Lincoln had finally issued the Emancipation Proclamation. “We shout for joy that we live to record this righteous decree,” wrote Frederick Douglass. Still, many believed the law should have gone further. They were upset that Lincoln had not freed *all* enslaved persons, including those in the border states.

ReadingHistory

A. Drawing Conclusions Why did Lincoln choose to limit his proclamation mostly to rebellious states?



ReadingHistory

B. Summarizing

Why did Northern Democrats oppose the Emancipation Proclamation?

Other people in the North, especially Democrats, were angered by the president's decision. Northern Democrats, the majority of whom were against emancipating even Southern slaves, claimed that the proclamation would only make the war longer by continuing to anger the South. A newspaperman in Ohio called Lincoln's proclamation "monstrous, impudent, and heinous . . . insulting to God as to man."

Most Union soldiers, though, welcomed emancipation. One officer noted that, although few soldiers were abolitionists, most were happy "to destroy everything that . . . gives the rebels strength."

White Southerners reacted to the proclamation with rage. Although it had limited impact in areas outside the reach of Northern armies, many slaves began to run away to Union lines. At the same time that these slaves deprived the Confederacy of labor, they also began to provide the Union with soldiers.

African-American Soldiers

In addition to freeing slaves, the Emancipation Proclamation declared that African-American men willing to fight "will be received into the armed service of the United States."

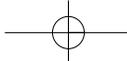
Frederick Douglass had argued for the recruitment of African-American soldiers since the start of the war. He declared, "Once [you] let the black man get upon his person the brass letters, U.S. . . . there is no power on earth which can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship."

Before the proclamation, the federal government had discouraged the enlistment of African Americans, and only a few regiments were formed. After emancipation, African Americans rushed to join the army. By war's end, about 180,000 black soldiers wore the blue uniform of the Union army.

African-American soldiers were organized in all-black regiments, usually led by white officers. They were often given the worst jobs

Thousands of African Americans, such as these men of the 4th U.S. Colored Troops, fought for the Union during the Civil War.





Now and then

AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE MILITARY

During the Civil War, no African-American soldier was promoted above the rank of captain. But times have changed. In 1989, General Colin Powell (shown below) was made a four-star general and named chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—the highest position in the military.

General Powell's appointment was the climax of a long struggle to fully integrate American armed forces. From the Civil War through World War II, African-American soldiers were kept apart from white soldiers and denied equal rights. However, in 1948, President Harry Truman ended segregation in the armed forces. Today the American military is fully integrated.



to do and were paid less than white soldiers. Despite these obstacles, African-American soldiers showed great courage on the battlefield and wore their uniforms with pride. More than one regiment insisted on fighting without pay rather than accepting lower pay than the white soldiers.

The 54th Massachusetts

One unit that insisted on fighting without pay was the **54th Massachusetts Regiment**, one of the first African-American regiments organized in the North. The soldiers of the 54th—among whom were two sons of Frederick Douglass—soon made the regiment the most famous of the Civil War.

The 54th Massachusetts earned its greatest fame in July 1863, when it led a heroic attack on Fort Wagner in South Carolina. The soldiers' bravery at Fort Wagner made the 54th a household name in the North and increased African-American enlistment.

The soldiers of the 54th Massachusetts and other African-American regiments faced grave dangers if captured. Rather than take African Americans as prisoners, Confederate soldiers often shot them or returned them to slavery.

The war demanded great sacrifices, not only from soldiers and prisoners, but also from people back home. In the next section, you will read about the hardships that the Civil War placed on the civilian populations in both the North and the South.

ReadingHistory

C. Identifying

Facts How did many black soldiers protest when they were offered lower pay than white soldiers?

Section 1 Assessment

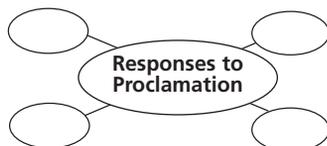
1. Terms & Names

Explain the significance of:

- Emancipation Proclamation
- 54th Massachusetts Regiment

2. Taking Notes

Use a chart to record responses to the Emancipation Proclamation.



How did the proclamation change Northerners' views of the war?

3. Main Ideas

- What was Lincoln's reason for not emancipating slaves when the war began?
- Why was the immediate impact of the Emancipation Proclamation limited?
- Why did black soldiers often face greater hardships than white soldiers?

4. Critical Thinking

Recognizing Effects How did the Emancipation Proclamation change the role of African Americans in the war?

THINK ABOUT

- how the proclamation changed military policy
- the response of many Southern slaves to the proclamation

ACTIVITY OPTIONS

TECHNOLOGY
MUSIC

Do research on the 54th Massachusetts Regiment. Create a **Web site** for the regiment or write a **song** about the soldiers' heroism at Fort Wagner.