

Background on the Emancipation Proclamation

(from <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2967.html>)

In his inaugural address, delivered on March 4, 1861, Lincoln proclaimed that it was his duty to maintain the Union. He also declared that he had no intention of ending slavery where it existed, or of repealing the Fugitive Slave Law – a position that horrified African Americans and their white allies.

To retain the loyalty of the border states – Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri – President Lincoln insisted that the war was not about slavery or black rights; it was a war to preserve the Union. His words were not simply aimed at the loyal southern states, however – most white northerners were not interested in fighting to free slaves or in giving rights to black people. For this reason, the government turned away African American volunteers who rushed to enlist. Lincoln upheld the laws barring blacks from the army, proving to northern whites that their race privilege would not be threatened.

The federal government had a harder time deciding what to do about escaping slaves. As the northern army pushed southward, thousands of fugitives fled across Union lines. Because there was no consistent federal policy regarding fugitives, individual commanders made their own decisions. Some put them to work for the Union forces; others wanted to return them to their owners. Finally, on August 6, 1861, fugitive slaves were declared to be "contraband of war" if their labor had been used to help the Confederacy in any way. And if found to be contraband, they were declared free.

Though "contraband" slaves had been declared free, Lincoln continued to insist that this was a war to save the Union, not to free slaves. But by 1862, Lincoln was considering emancipation as a necessary step toward winning the war. The South was using enslaved people to aid the war effort. Black men and women were forced to build fortifications, work as blacksmiths, nurses, boatmen, and laundresses, and to work in factories, hospitals, and armories. In the meantime, the North was refusing to accept the services of black volunteers and freed slaves, the very people who most wanted to defeat the slaveholders.

Document A: The Emancipation Proclamation (Modified)

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 in rebellion against the United States, shall be forever free. . .

Now, therefore I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, by virtue of the power in me vested as Commander-in-Chief, of the Army and Navy of the United States. . .do order and designate [appoint] the following States as being in rebellion:

Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia.

And I hereby call upon the people so declared to be free to abstain from all violence, unless in necessary self-defense; and I recommend to them that, in all cases when allowed, they labor faithfully for reasonable wages.

And I further declare and make known, that such persons will be received into the armed service of the United States.

And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God.

By the President: ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Document B: Frederick Douglass (Modified)

President Lincoln did me the honor to invite me to discuss the best way to [persuade] the slaves in the rebel states to escape. Lincoln was alarmed about the increasing opposition to the war in the North, and the mad cry against it being an abolition war. Lincoln worried that [Northerners who opposed the war would force him to accept an early peace] which would leave all those who had not escaped in slavery.

I was impressed by this kind consideration because before he had said that his goal was to save the Union, with or without slavery. What he said on this day showed a deeper moral conviction against slavery than I had ever seen before in anything spoken or written by him. I listened with the deepest interest and profoundest satisfaction, and, at his suggestion, agreed to organize men who would go into the rebel states, and carry the news of emancipation, and urge the slaves to come within our boundaries....

I refer to this conversation because I think that, on Mr. Lincoln's part, it is evidence that the proclamation, so far at least as he was concerned, was not passed merely as a 'necessity.'

Source: In mid-1863, after the Emancipation Proclamation had been announced, President Lincoln called Frederick Douglass to the White House to speak with him. Douglass wrote about the meeting in 1881 in The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass.

Guiding Questions

Name _____

Document A: Emancipation Proclamation

1. The Civil War ended in 1865. Why did Lincoln decide to free the slaves before the war even ended?
2. In the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln does not mention Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, and Missouri. These states had slaves but were not part of the Confederacy (they were not fighting against the Union). What happens to the slaves in these states?
3. Why do you think he calls the act a “military necessity” in the last section?

Document B: Frederick Douglass

1. According to Douglass, what was happening in the North in 1863?
2. What was Lincoln worried about?
3. What is Douglass’s conclusion about Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation?
4. Douglass wrote about his meeting with Lincoln almost 20 years later. How might the passage of time affect Douglass’s memory of Lincoln and his evaluation of the Emancipation Proclamation?

Name _____

**Did Lincoln free the slaves?
Or did the slaves free themselves?**

| Evidence that Lincoln Freed the Slaves | Evidence that the Slaves Freed Themselves |
|---|--|
| | |
| Conclusion: | |