

Emancipation proclamation- lincoln's end of slavery in america

[Sociology](#), [Slavery](#)



Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation is still, to date, one of the most debated, revolutionary acts of the any of the Presidents of the United States. Through this document Lincoln took responsibility upon himself for the freedom of four million slaves throughout the divided country he presided over and forever changed the scene of what could be a very different American culture than that of which we live in presently today. After reading Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America, written by Allen C. Guelzo, I am fully convinced that Lincoln's accomplishment through that document is very under credited not only by African Americans today, but also by their white counterparts in regards to the lasting impact it made for the future of the races in this country. Allen C. Guelzo opens his book on the defensive for Abraham Lincoln. Guelzo explains that when the topic of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation comes to mind, basically, either you appreciate it at face value for what it accomplished and stands for, or you are a skeptic.

Today more than ever, the Proclamation's skeptics focus on what the document did not accomplish rather than what it did. In his book, Guelzo works at answering the four main questions that critics will raise regarding the Proclamation. Why is the language of the Proclamation so bland and Legalistic? Did the Proclamation actually do anything? Did the slaves free themselves? Did Lincoln issue the Proclamation to ward off European influence or boost Union morale?

In defense of Lincoln, Guelzo takes us through a detailed chronology of the events leading up to the weighted decision made by Lincoln in September

1862, including incredible evidence in the form of documented conversations and eye witness accounts. Abraham Lincoln was a product of the end of the Enlightenment Era, an era that emphasized the age of reason and logic. Being a lawyer by profession, Lincoln exhibited an incredible display of prudence in making his decisions and showed an exceptional respect for the law. When considering the term “ prudence”, Guezlo makes it a point to examine the word in the fashion of that it would have meant to the classical philosophers that Lincoln came to admire. In this sense, prudence isn't defined as what it is known as today. By today's definition, a person who is “prude” is thought to display exaggerated caution, hesitation, lack of will, and fearfulness. According to Guezlo, the prudence that Lincoln displayed while in office would be better compared to the virtues of the classical philosophers who influenced the Enlightenment period which attributed prudence to shrewdness and sound judgment.

Considering all the different obstacles that were thrown at Lincoln during his presidency, he needed to ensure that his actions were deliberate and would achieve a long term lasting effect as he was very cautious and untrusting when considering the judiciary branch of the government. Lincoln understood that any decision he made would be readily tested against the powers afforded to him by the constitution sooner or later.

He did not want to take any chances in going about the emancipation process loosely, especially considering the amount of opponents he was going to face regarding the topic of emancipation both in the North and the South. Of the many ways to go about the emancipation process, Lincoln's

preference was that which consisted of three main features, “ gradualism, compensation, and the vote of the people”. He rebuked ideas of using either the Confiscation Acts and Benjamin Butler’s contraband theory as well as the idea of martial law in order to achieve long term emancipation.

As far as the contraband theory was concerned, at best Lincoln knew that it would make slaves wards of the government until the end of the war. After compromise was reached, the fate of these men was out of his hands and into the hands of the ruling courts which would likely allow them to be reclaimed by their masters. Before issuing his own proclamation, Lincoln actually reversed two attempts at martial law proclamations attempted by both John Charles Freemont and David Hunter.

Lincoln did not reverse these attempts so much because he was not for the emancipation process, but because in his legalistic mind, he knew that these courses of action would not stand the judicial test in regards to the limitations of the constitution. First of all, the use of the war powers in question would only be reserved for use by the commander-in-chief, namely himself; secondly there were no specifications provided within the constitution itself on the use of these war powers if they did in fact exist. Lincoln was firm in his desire to convince the border states to accept his offer of compensated emancipation and aside from being denied time and again, he would continue to be convinced that given enough time and patience at the matter, that politicians in those states would see that the course of events leading to emancipation as inevitable and take the bait

which he hoped would set off a chain reaction allowing other states to follow suit shortly thereafter.

Though this plan eventually proved unworkable, it was not because of an unperceivable plan; Lincoln was not entirely prepared for the time restraints that unforeseen obstacles would pose in his attempt at being gradual.

Between the defiant and incompetent military generals and the urging of different opinions in Washington, eventually his final course of action would be to take a gamble at using the war powers he was still uncertain and uneasy about and hope that with careful consideration, his document would not be challenged but gain support.

Noting Lincoln's wariness pertaining to the legality of his actions according to the constitution would lead us to the answer of the first of Gutzlo's four questions. Why was the language of the proclamation so bland and legalistic? In contrast to the conclusions of many critics that Lincoln had no feelings of moral obligation or sympathy towards the slaves, Lincoln was greatly afflicted by the issue at hand.

After understanding the caution which Lincoln was trained to proceed with as an attorney and even more so as the President of the United States, Lincoln had to ensure that every syllable, every phrase was written so that it could not be scrutinized within the federal court system. His document held the fate of the lives of millions of people within its wording and he did not want to have to be faced with the possibility that it would be retracted or revoked.

Many also believe that the wording of the Emancipation Proclamation is so bland because Lincoln composed it grudgingly as a last resort.

Guezlo points out that during Lincoln's political career his presidency was not the first time that Lincoln had motivation for emancipation. In his term in Congress as an Illinois Representative he made similar attempts at compensated emancipation for slaves in the District of Columbia. Although these attempts never made it to the House, it is notable to recognize that his feelings towards emancipation stem back farther than having to make a pressured decision as Commander in Chief of a nation in rebellion.

He was recorded as having been completely transparent in his belief that " If slavery is not wrong, then nothing is wrong. " Upon disclosing his decision to issue the proclamation to his cabinet it is also important to realize that Lincoln did not address his colleagues for advice whether or not to issue the proclamation as his mind was already made up, but rather to " hear the views of his associates and receive and suggestions. As defeated as he may have felt over not having had enough time to follow through with the compensation route, it is unarguable that Lincoln did not hold a deep conviction about what had to be accomplished before he left office.

In intimate conversations with close colleagues he would comment on his conviction that this decision had been of Divine assistance and that " he had sometime thought that perhaps he might be an instrument in God's had of accomplishing a great work. In fact he openly expressed his agenda were there to be any concerns regarding the standing of his proclamation. Lincoln

remarked that if there was to be a retraction or nullifying of the right of freedom to emancipated slaves through the courts that “ it would not occur with him in office”. The second question raised by critics that Guezlo seeks to shed some light on is whether or not the Emancipation Proclamation actually did anything.

To answer this question, Guezlo moves to highlight the fact that although the Emancipation Proclamation had little immediate impact, it embraced the idea for the first time that there was a long term and permanent solution to the institution of slavery. Not only did it ring the bells of freedom for the slaves, but it also gave the Union an even more dignified reason to continue on with the war. Although the feeling was not unanimous amongst even some of the abolitionists of the day, the expected “ mutiny” that was expected to result from those in the armed forces in protest of the proclamation was not as severe as could've been predicted.

As soon as more and more whites were exposed to former slaves they began to realize that this label of inferiority in both the mental and physical capacity was not as accurate as they had been led to believe. One Maine soldier admitted to his sister in a letter that, “ instead of thinking less of a Negro, I have sadly learned to think better of them than many white men that hold responsible positions. ” Among the newly freed black slaves came finally the feeling of attaining manhood through emancipation.

With this feeling of manhood came the rallying of blacks willing and able to join the war effort as made eligible by the proclamation. The proclamation's

provision allowing blacks to enlist into the armed forces further secured the position of freedom in the eyes of the white man in the long term. For “ how could we stand to see the Negro re-enslaved after demonstrating his allegiance to our Union with his blood? ” asked one Union commander.

In fact, not only was granting the slaves their freedom a major issue upon observing their willingness to loyally serve the military, but also the right of suffrage; although the move for socialequalitywouldn't be addressed nearly as soon, the move to place more political power in the hands of the former slaves was introduced. Lincoln's document would secure the way for future legislation which eventually would result in the complete abolition of slavery with the thirteenth amendment to the constitution.

The proclamation also managed to avoid the mass deportation of freed blacks to Africa or South America as some abolitionists were in favor of. In addition to the effects nationally, the Emancipation Proclamation also helped gain a favorable opinion abroad throughout Europe for the United States transforming the civil conflict into a war against slavery ensuring that the Union would have nothing to fear from possible European recognition of the Confederacy. Did the slaves free themselves? Guezlo makes an important point when answering this question and the answer tends to be a bit more unexpected.

Although the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect on January 1, 1863, it is surprising to understand that although the rejoicing of slaves upon receiving the news of emancipation was universal, more slaves than less

remained put where they were waiting patiently for the Union soldiers to declare them free rather than run off to claim their freedom. But why stay put? According to his book, Guezlo remarks that even Abraham Lincoln himself was disappointed that more slaves had not taken it upon themselves to reach over to the other side of Union lines. Especially since he understood that with the upcoming perceived threat to his presidency from McClellan the only way he could ensure their emancipation was if they crossed Union lines before that threat could have a chance to materialize).

One of the main reasons that more slaves did not readily embrace leaving their current positions was because of a fear that they would be returned to their masters just as they had heard many of the “contrabands” had been refused by the military prior to the proclamation. Unfortunately the lack of trust slaves placed in the white ace extended not only to those who had kept them in bondage, but also to those whom they knew even less of. Guezlo quotes Ohio Congressman William Homan, who thought it odd as well that, “three and a half or four millions of Africans remain right in the hotbed of this rebellion, with your proclamations cast broadcast over the South inviting them to freedom; nay, your policy urged them to assert their freedom and pledges the nation to maintain it,” yet, “they have remained perfectly indifferent and passive until your Army has reached them, idle spectators of war. The quiescence of the black population actually turned out to become an argument in favor of the emancipation as it demonstrated the restraint and self control the slaves possessed even in the face of “easy bloody opportunity”.

Francis Wayland in Atlantic Monthly concluded that “ Nine-tenths of the able-bodied Southern population have been in arms for more than two years and the President’s Emancipation Proclamation was made public nearly a year ago and yet none of the older men, women, and children remaining at home have been slaughtered, massacred or brutalized. Did Lincoln issue the Proclamation to ward off European influence or boost Union morale? This question seems to be Lincoln’s critic’s double edged sword, although a poor attempt might I add. Guezlo adds an interesting note that if morale or intervention were Lincoln’s primary concerns to be addressed, then issuing the proclamation when he did would’ve been the worst possible method he could’ve taken to do so.

Alexander Twining wrote in 1865 that, “ European intervention – and especially from England – was, at the time when the proclamation was issued, our most anxious liability. Lincoln’s main concern was that the British would intervene in response to an emancipation proclamation so long as emancipation was seen as a “ direct encouragement to servile Insurrections”, sparking the British government’s memories of the racial carnage of the Indian Mutiny. It was actually during the Chicago ministers’ delegation in September 1862 that any argument for European sympathy was made convincing Lincoln that the issuance of the proclamation may gain the Union any favor. Attempts to down play Lincoln’s motives for standing firm behind his proclamation with this attack are quickly debunked.

The second part of this question implies that Lincoln made his decision for emancipation based off of some incentive of united sentiment that would’ve

been received as a whole country. This could not be more false. When Lincoln initially issued the Emancipation Proclamation, politically, lines were torn across the board. Within congress debates ran heated and from state to state more and more republicans were losing favor and being replaced with peace Democrats and proslavery advocates.

When it came time for the next elections to congress, Lincoln was hurt to see his majority in the House weaken before his eyes. Lincoln and his supporters fully understood before they issued the proclamation that this would in fact place their positions in government in jeopardy. He also understood that with the military advocating their own desires to negotiate a peaceful compromise with the Confederacy, that this could easily convince them to accelerate an intervention placing Lincoln's administration in danger of losing the cause.

Eventually Lincoln's administration would prevail against slavery not only in the Confederate states but also in the Border States. Beginning with West Virginia in 1862, the Border States finally began to embrace the inevitable and took advantage of the only option that was advantageous for them which was to agree to the compensated emancipation package that Lincoln had been pushing for all along.

In the end it was even difficult for Lincoln's most radical abolitionist critics to remain skeptical of the President's personal conviction and determination regarding his motives with his Emancipation Proclamation. In a meeting with Frederick Douglas, Lincoln's foremost freed black critic, Douglas was

surprised to report that, “ I was taken aback to discover that Lincoln had a deeper moral conviction against slavery than I had ever seen before in anything spoken or written by him”.

Very few of the negative possibilities considered that could have taken place in response to the Emancipation Proclamation actually did. This was largely in part to the strict measures that Lincoln took as a skilled attorney and leader when drafting his plan and his determination to make the Proclamation succeed. During the time following the Emancipation Proclamation and even for years beyond his assassination, Lincoln was held in high esteem amongst the African American as well as the white population in this country.

Unfortunately since the earlier 1900s many critics, both black and white, have risen to the occasion to minimize the greatness to which he impacted generations of human beings to come. Some claim Lincoln was a “ white supremacist” only acting in the best interests of saving his country and others, at best, describe him as indifferent to the African struggle.

Regardless of which position you try to understand, it is ridiculous to consider that, in either case, a man who felt no deep conviction for the nature of his actions would've remained persistent in his course to the conclusion.

Had Lincoln really felt any other way than sympathetic towards the slaves he would've bowed down and compromised as many congressman and generals urged of him. Allen Guezlo makes his point strongly apparent; Abraham

Lincoln's actions spoke clearly of his the driving force behind his actions. " It would be special pleading to claim that Lincoln was in the end the most perfect friend black Americans have ever had, but it would also be the cheapest and most ignorant of all skepticisms to deny that he was the most significant. "