

Emancipation proclamation essay sample



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From the beginning of the Civil War in 1861, President Abraham Lincoln repeatedly stated that his primary objective of the war was not to abolish the institution of slavery, but rather to preserve the Union. Lincoln knew that the Constitution protected slavery in any state where the citizens wanted it. As the war progressed, the abolition of slavery was seen as a military strategy for the Union army, as the newly freed slaves would then fight for the cause of their own freedom. Since it was a military necessity, it was warranted by the constitution. Because of this, and pressure from both fellow Republicans as well as Northern abolitionists, Abraham Lincoln issued an Emancipation Proclamation, freeing all slaves in rebellious states and permitting them to join the Union army, effective as of January 1, 1863.

Although the Constitution refrained him from abolishing slavery entirely, it empowered him to seize any enemy property being used to wage war against the United States. The most valuable property that the Confederacy possessed were slaves. Their slaves toiled in the fields, tending to crops that were used for food and clothing in the Southern war effort, keeping food and factories running smoothly so men could be free to fight in the army. By taking the slaves away from the Confederacy, Abraham Lincoln was not only diminishing the embers of hope for victory that the South had, but also rekindling the flame of strength for the Union army.

General Benjamin Butler, a commander of Union forces occupying Fortress Monroe in Virginia on the James River, provided a legal rationale that sparked the idea of emancipation, and opened up a door way for Union army success. When three slaves escaped unto his lines on May 25 1861, he declared them all “ contraband of war” and refused to return them to their

Confederate owner. After hearing word of the chance for freedom that this new idea created, hundreds of

“contrabands” escaped to Union lines in the months that followed. On the 30 of August, 1861, General John C. Fremont issued a proclamation declaring slaves of Missourians that were taking up arms against the Unites States to be free. Another date in which commanders of army took actions opposing slavery was on May 9, 1862, when General David Hunter proclaimed the emancipation of slaves in his Department, which included Georgia, Florida, and South Carolina. However, it was just a matter of time before President Lincoln overruled this emancipation, because “On every occasion that his generals had announced the emancipation of the slaves in their military districts, Lincoln had overruled them,” (page 276, Don’t Know Much About The Civil War, Kenneth C. Davis, 1996).

On the sixth of August, 1861, Congress passed a confiscation act that provided for the “emancipation of slaves employed in arms of labor against the United States” (Encyclopedia of American History, Morris). In March of 1862, Congress enacted a new article of war forbidding army officers to return fugitive slaves to their masters. A second confiscation act was passed on the 17 of July, 1862, declaring the liberation of “slaves of all persons who committed treason or supported the rebellion” (Encyclopedia of American History, Morris). With these new acts passed, the slaves themselves had taken the initiative to make this war a war for their liberation. Most Republicans had been convinced by the year 1862 that “a war against slaveholders’ rebellion must become a war against slavery itself”

(www.history.com/topics/emancipation-proclamation). The Republican party then put pressure on Abraham Lincoln to emancipate the slaves in the south. As an individual, Lincoln loathed the institution of slavery and felt that abolition was the morally correct thing to do, however, as the president of the United States, he felt compelled to balance things for both the Union and the rebellious Confederacy, not only for the sake of preserving the country but also to cause no further quarrel where it was avoidable.

After a string of Union military victories in the early months of 1862, they suffered many losses to the Confederacy in the months of July and August. They were in need of something that would strengthen their army, and an emancipation would do just so. The emancipation had become a “military necessity”, as Abraham Lincoln told the members of his cabinet. “We must free the slaves or be ourselves subdued... The Administration must set an example, and strike at the heart of the rebellion” (The Reader’s Companion. Eric Foner, 1991). After hearing the proposal of this proclamation, Lincoln’s Secretary of State, William H. Seward, persuaded Lincoln to withhold the proclamation until the Union had a position of strength. He asked him to wait until the Union had a significant military victory to hold over the South’s head.

The Battle of Antietam provided the Union the military victory that they needed to push the emancipation. This fateful battle had been perpetuated by the Maryland Campaign of 1862, which was Confederate General Robert E. Lee’s plan to attack the north. Lee’s plan was to draw the Union army away from its supplies and fortifications. After hearing of these plans, President Lincoln put Major General George B. McClellan in command of the

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Union's Army of the Potomac, which consisted of 70,000 men (Encyclopedia of American History, Morris). On September 17, 1862, the bloodiest battle of the Civil War took place, one that would be unsurpassed in carnage for the rest of the war. At least 23,000 soldiers were killed, wounded, or missing after twelve gruesome hours of savage combat between opposing forces (www.nps.gov/anacm/index.htm). 2,108 Union soldiers were killed, and 9,549 were wounded, whereas for the Confederate Army, originally consisting of 40,000 rebellious men, lost 2,700 men to the hand of death, and left another 9,029 wounded. This battle was not only important for the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, but it also prevented European Intervention on behalf of the Confederacy. England and France realized that the victor was more likely to be the Union. Since the Emancipation Proclamation freed the slaves, it transitioned the focus of the war to slavery in European eyes, and since both England and France had already abolished slavery, it made it impossible for them to support the Confederacy. One short month after the victory over the Confederate army in the Battle of Antietam, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation as "an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity."

Abraham Lincoln presented a drafted idea of the Emancipation Proclamation to his Cabinet on July 22, 1862, and two months later, on September 22 a Preliminary emancipation proclamation was issued, to take effect on the first of the new year. Abraham Lincoln sincerely believed the emancipation to be "an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity," (The Civil War, Harry Hansen, 1961, pg 276). Upon signing the Proclamation, Abraham Lincoln stated, "I have never in my life felt more <https://assignbuster.com/emancipation-proclamation-essay-sample/>

certain that I was doing right that I do in signing this paper,” (The Civil War, Shelby Foote, pg 120). The Emancipation Proclamation declared that “ all persons held as slaves... shall be then, thenceforth, and forever free”. This not only diminished any hopes that the Confederacy had had for foreign intervention, but also freed all slaves in rebellious states, excluding thirteen parishes in Louisiana, 48 counties in the future state of West Virginia, and seven counties in East Virginia (Don’t Know Much About the Civil War, Kenneth C. Davis, 1996). It also permitted the emancipated blacks to join the army, fulfilling the Union’s enlistment quotas.