

What were the pressures on Lincoln as he contemplated the question of emancipation...

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What were the pressures on Lincoln as he contemplated the question of emancipation? What factors did he consider and why? It was not easy for Abraham Lincoln to issue the emancipation proclamation in 1862. The decision was critical to the union's success in the civil war. After watching the third episode of Ken Burns's documentary, one could say that being the president of the United States during the civil war, Lincoln must have been so stressed and pressured by the divided American people. As the country's chief executive, he had faced many political struggles. He must have been so distressed to see the many soldiers who died just to preserve the union. He was actually caught in the middle during the civil war. He could not immediately decide whether to completely free the slaves or not. Lincoln wanted to maintain all the allies of the union as well as to heed the moral call of his people. To note, when the civil war started, some of the union states were in favor of slavery. These states (the border states) believed that slavery was crucial to their economic stability. West Virginia, Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky and Missouri were the so called border states. Most of them wanted to side with the union while some chose to be neutral grounds. Lincoln wanted to preserve this political situation. The border states such as Maryland and Kentucky were important to the union. Lincoln was afraid to lose these border states. He did not want these states to become confederate members. Kentucky was actually active in slave trade. It was against any governmental act that would free the slaves. Lincoln had expressed his view that to lose Kentucky will mean losing the civil war against the rebels (Burns, n. d.). He thought that the union will eventually lose the support of Kentucky if the emancipation proclamation would cover

its territory. Actually, Kentucky became loyal to the union after it was not successfully invaded by the confederate army. In such case, the plan for complete emancipation of slaves was delayed for a certain period. Later on, the preliminary attempts toward emancipation were only applied to the other union states except the border states. Luckily, due to that decision, Lincoln was able to keep the loyalty of the border states especially Kentucky. The president was also able to gather the support from the War Democrats. When Lincoln contemplated again on the issue of emancipation, he considered the fact that the union was losing more and more soldiers. In the course of the civil war, it was hard for the union to achieve victory. Most of the time, the encounters did not result to a win-loss situation. As a strategy, Lincoln had thought that by freeing the slaves, the union military force could be strengthened. He actually planned to enlist black soldiers in the union military. He planned to utilize the skills of the black people. At this time, Lincoln may have realized that in war, color or racial difference does not matter anymore. Moreover, Lincoln must have entertained the idea of enlisting slaves to outnumber the confederate soldiers. Notably, the rebels were against the enlistment of black soldiers. Such would be an act of betrayal on their part. In this context, if the war continues, the union will still have a lot of reserves while the confederate will find it hard to fight back. In planning for the emancipation proclamation, Lincoln also took into consideration his respectability within the American society (Burns, n. d.). It is to be noted that when the issue on slavery was hotly debated by the American people, he made statements expressing his opposition to the freedom of slaves. In this sense, if he will proclaim a contrary statement,

then, the American people might disrespect him for being inconsistent as to his political position. Stated otherwise, he was bothered that the move for the complete abolition of slavery would affect his dignity as a person and a leader. While the civil war was going on, Lincoln was also pressured by the many abolitionist movements. He was thinking that he can't just ignore the groups' concern about the plight of slaves within the American society. He considered the movements as important to his plan for complete abolition of slavery. Lincoln may have understood the emergence of the movements since the southern state was the first one to prohibit slavery in some of its states. Overall, the former president was concerned of personal and public matters when he contemplated on the question of emancipation.

Nonetheless, on September 1862, he successfully issued the emancipation decree while maintaining the support of the border states, War Democrats, Britain and France (Burns, n. d.). The slaves then were forever free.

Reference Burns, K. (n. d.). The civil war - Forever Free [Episode Three].

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