

Emancipation proclamation slaves



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What events shaped the writing of the Emancipation Proclamation?

Emancipation was not a new idea in the world. Many countries had freed the slaves earlier in the 1800's even going into the 1830's for the British slaves. This may have caused a fear on the parts of the proslavery people. Because of this, the slave owners in the south wanted a ban on slaves coming from the West Indies and other places where slaves were being freed. The Emancipation Proclamation did not come easy to President Lincoln. The President took over two years to come to the decision that there was even a need for such a document. In that time there was pressure coming from both sides of the issue at President Lincoln. Many events led to the proclamation. What drove Lincoln to finally write it? Did he feel an obligation to free the slaves? Was it a stance to take to keep the Union engaged in the war? Was it pressure from his generals and political figures? Some might be astonished that Abraham Lincoln wrote the Emancipation Proclamation based on his non-action on the slavery issue.

John H. Franklin noted in his book on the Emancipation Proclamation, In his inaugural address President Lincoln declared that he had no purpose, ' directly or indirectly, to interfere with slavery where it exists. Due to federalist principles, Lincoln did not feel that it was his place, as president; to intervene with an issue that he felt was a state matter. Lincoln did question slavery in the territories. You can trace this back to the Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858. Suppose, he queried, the people of a territory should vote slavery down? The Supreme Court in the Dred Scott decision had decreed

that they could not. Who would prevail, the Court or the people? We know from history that slave states did not want to be outnumbered by free states. No matter how the Supreme Court ruled, Douglas argued, slavery would stay down if the people voted it down. This is supported by the many of the abolitionists of the day.

President Lincoln felt pressure for emancipation from a few avenues. Early in 1861, Senator Lyman Trumbull, from Illinois, brought pressure with the introduction of the Confiscation Act. Trumbull stated, contrabands would no longer be slaves if and only if they had been employed by the Confederate armed services. Congress felt that the slaves could be used as a tool against the Confederacy, due to their dependency on them and the view that slaves are property.

After the publishing of the first Confiscation Act, pressure escalated even more for emancipation. Lincoln's Secretary of War, Simon Cameron, believed it to be in the best interest of the North to, emancipate the slaves, and arm them. This caused a widespread debate because Cameron did not issue this report to the president; he circulated it to the postmasters. Lincoln was not pleased with this, which was a contributing factor to Cameron's replacement with Edwin M. Stanton. Believing that the war with the South would be over rather quickly, Lincoln did not feel a need to deal with the slavery issue, thinking the Union would reunite as status quo.

Cameron would not be the only person Lincoln had to replace. General John Charles Fremont sought to end Missouri's neutrality. Fremont issued martial law, and declared that all slaves should be set free in Missouri. This put

Lincoln in the position of asking Fremont to modify his proclamation to conform to the Confiscation Act. Fremont refused to do so and the President made it an order. Fremont was ultimately relieved of command due to the conflict. This may have expanded the thoughts of emancipation in Lincoln's mind, but more pressure would emerge from Congressman Thaddeus Stevens.

Stevens introduced a bill, asking Lincoln to emancipate ' all slaves who leave their masters, or who shall aid in the quelling the rebellion. If this action was followed through, it could be looked upon at as Congress attempting to take the emancipation question out of the hands of Lincoln. This did not sway Lincoln; he just reminded them that they must answer for their actions. Lincoln did grant, freedom to all fugitive slaves in Union Army camps and acknowledged that the government would be responsible for their welfare. This provided a split avenue for Lincoln to pursue; he did not give outright emancipation to all, but granted freedom to slaves that were adding the Union, and allowed them to remain free. Lincoln still had paths he could choose from, keeping his options open, Lincoln vowed at the end of his annual message to employ all indispensable means including emancipation- to preserve the union. Preserving the union, again, was his ultimate goal, and we would be shown that Lincoln would consider all avenues to attain it.

After the emancipation attempt by Stevens, Senator Turnbull introduced a second confiscation act. More intense than the first, it was adamant in seizing and confiscating anything the Union Army could obtain when defeating the Confederacy. Not only did it stick it to the South, but allowed an influx of freed slaves as troops into the Union army. Before Union officers

could return runaway slaves to their owners, court hearings were held to determine the loyalties of the slave owners. The bill also provided cash to establish colonies for the freed slaves, outside of the United States, to keep from disrupting white society. The act proposed that the confiscation be taken legally, in addition to whatever items the federal armies deemed of value on their raids of the rebels. By establishing freed slave colonies outside of the United States, Northerners who feared freed slaves were set at ease. This act was very important in the building of the road to emancipation, setting the precedence that freed slaves could be inducted into Union Armies, and employing the use of colonies that Lincoln would ask for, and be granted by Congress.

In Lincoln's view, gradual emancipation would be best for the country, allowing citizens to become slowly introduced to the idea. Lincoln thought that slavery was the disease of the entire nation and all must share in the suffering of its removal. Lincoln also thought that gradual emancipation would allow the border states a way out of the war, which would then shorten the war because the confederates would have very few men and supplies without the supply rich states of Virginia.

Lincoln had another Union general attempt to force his hand on the issue emancipation from General David Hunter. A strong supporter of infusing blacks into the army, he issued a proclamation, General Order 11, emancipating all slaves in the states of South Carolina, Florida, and Georgia. He did not clear his decision with the president, and consequently the President was furious. The president refused to allow any military official to usurp his authority on emancipation. Lincoln was set on establishing that

emancipation was an executive decision, to be made by the president, not Union generals or anyone else.

Military losses began to pressure Lincoln as well. The Union forces abandoned the Peninsula Campaign as a costly failure, and Lincoln temporarily abandoned McClellan as commander of the Army of the Potomac-though Lee's army had suffered some twenty thousand casualties to McClellan's ten thousand. The Confederate army would win several more battles, putting more pressure on Lincoln, who still wanted a gradual emancipation; knew it was time to act, if for any reason, to replenish lost forces. The Union setbacks in Virginia had persuaded Lincoln to take the first tentative step toward emancipation. ' Things had gone from bad to worse,' Lincoln later recalled, ' until I felt that we had reached the end of our rope on the plan of operations we had been pursuing; that we had about played our last card, and must change tactics, or lose the game. This was Lincoln endorsing an approach to a new military strategy, after so many previous setbacks. Lincoln wanted a statement, possibly a large victory for the Union, to launch the emancipation. Lincoln would look to Antietam, a draw more than a victory.

Bloody Antietam was also the long-awaited victory that Lincoln needed for launching his Emancipation Proclamation. Antietam served as the needed emancipation springboard. The halting of Lee's offensive was just enough of a victory to justify Lincoln's issuing, on September 23, 1862, the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. Lincoln felt that this was the right time to issue it, with the Confederate army retreating to Virginia. One of Lincoln's hopes, in issuing the Preliminary Proclamation was to deprive the South of its slave

labor force, thus undermining the military effectiveness of the Confederacy. If slaves left their southern plantations, many farmers would not be able to harvest their crops; fighting southern men would worry about family back home, possibly deserting the Confederate army to go home and protect what is left.

The final proclamation was issued on January 1, 1863. Note that in the final declaration, there is no mention of colonization or compensation. Due to Congress controlling all aspects of the budget, Lincoln may have felt that he could not get those two resolutions through the legislative branch. In the document itself, Lincoln is admitting that he freed the slaves to help him militarily, not on principle. Although he may have felt morally that it was the right thing to do, his main reason was a military need, in the final paragraph of the proclamation that the measure was ‘warranted by the Constitution upon military necessity.

In one-way or another all of these events influenced the Emancipation Proclamation. Ultimately, it was a military need that led to its execution. Lincoln, influenced by Cameron, or Turnbull’s confiscation acts, may have not thought to free slaves for the Union army profit of taking on the rebels. Without edicts from Fremont and Hunter, the president would not have taken as strong a stand as he did, not even making the proclamation a military order, or a military necessity. Though all of these are great factors that contributed, Lincoln was influenced most by the military need to emancipate slaves. Recruitment troubles dictated it to be so, and allowing black soldiers into the Union army eased recruitment. A great document

granting freedom and born of military necessity, the Emancipation Proclamation also shows the compassion of President Lincoln.

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