

The Politics of War

MAIN IDEA

By issuing the Emancipation Proclamation, President Lincoln made slavery the focus of the war.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The Proclamation was a first step toward improving the status of African Americans.

Terms & Names

- Emancipation Proclamation
- habeas corpus
- Copperhead
- conscription

One American's Story

Shortly after the Civil War began, William Yancey of Alabama and two other Confederate diplomats asked Britain—a major importer of Southern cotton—to formally recognize the Confederacy as an independent nation. The British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs met with them twice, but in May 1861, Britain announced its neutrality. Insulted, Yancey returned home and told his fellow Southerners not to hope for British aid.

A PERSONAL VOICE WILLIAM YANCEY

“You have no friends in Europe. . . . The sentiment of Europe is anti-slavery, and that portion of public opinion which forms, and is represented by, the government of Great Britain, is abolition. They will never recognize our independence until our conquering sword hangs dripping over the prostrate heads of the North. . . . It is an error to say that ‘Cotton is King.’ It is not. It is a great and influential factor in commerce, but not its dictator.”

—quoted in *The Civil War: A Narrative*



William Yancey,
1851

In spite of Yancey's words, many Southerners continued to hope that economic necessity would force Britain to come to their aid. Meanwhile, abolitionists waged a public opinion war against slavery, not only in Europe, but in the North.

Britain Remains Neutral

A number of economic factors made Britain no longer dependent on Southern cotton. Not only had Britain accumulated a huge cotton inventory just before the outbreak of war, it also found new sources of cotton in Egypt and India. Moreover, when Europe's wheat crop failed, Northern wheat and corn replaced cotton as an essential import. As one magazine put it, “Old King Cotton's dead and buried.” Britain decided that neutrality was the best policy—at least for a while.

THE TRENT AFFAIR In the fall of 1861, an incident occurred to test that neutrality. The Confederate government sent two diplomats, James Mason and John Slidell, in a second attempt to gain support from Britain and France. The two men



traveled aboard a British merchant ship, the *Trent*. Captain Charles Wilkes of the American warship *San Jacinto* stopped the *Trent* and arrested the two men. The British threatened war against the Union and dispatched 8,000 troops to Canada. Aware of the need to fight just “one war at a time,” Lincoln freed the two prisoners, publicly claiming that Wilkes had acted without orders. Britain was as relieved as the United States was to find a peaceful way out of the crisis.

The first page of Lincoln’s hand-written copy of the Emancipation Proclamation ▼

Proclaiming Emancipation

As the South struggled in vain to gain foreign recognition, abolitionist feeling grew in the North. Some Northerners believed that just winning the war would not be enough if the issue of slavery was not permanently settled.

LINCOLN’S VIEW OF SLAVERY Although Lincoln disliked slavery, he did not believe that the federal government had the power to abolish it where it already existed. When Horace Greeley urged him in 1862 to transform the war into an abolitionist crusade, Lincoln replied that although it was his personal wish that all men could be free, his official duty was different: “My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or destroy Slavery.”

As the war progressed, however, Lincoln did find a way to use his constitutional war powers to end slavery. Slave labor built fortifications and grew food for the Confederacy. As commander in chief, Lincoln decided that, just as he could order the Union army to seize Confederate supplies, he could also authorize the army to emancipate slaves.

Emancipation offered a strategic benefit. The abolitionist movement was strong in Britain, and emancipation would discourage Britain from supporting the Confederacy. Emancipation was not just a moral issue; it became a weapon of war. **A**

EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION On January 1, 1863, Lincoln issued his **Emancipation Proclamation**. The following portion captured national attention.

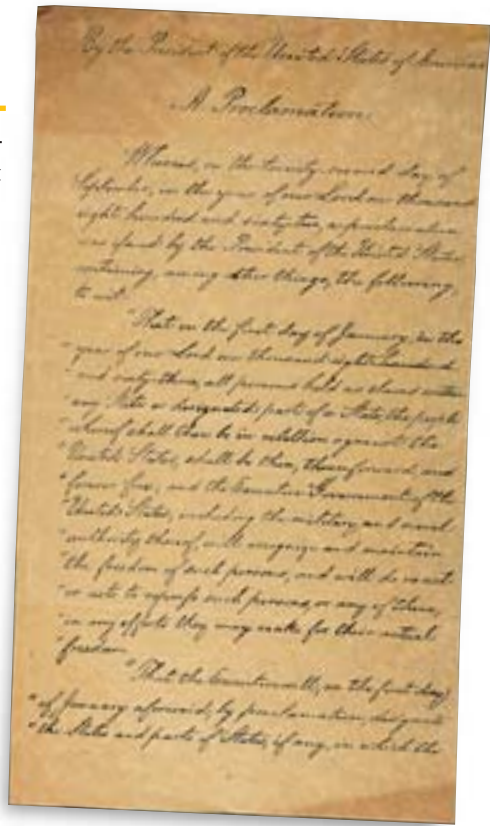
from **THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION** ABRAHAM LINCOLN

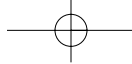
“All persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free. . . . And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God.”

Lincoln presents the Emancipation Proclamation to his cabinet, 1862. ▼

MAIN IDEA
Summarizing
A In what way was the Emancipation Proclamation a part of Lincoln’s military strategy?

The Proclamation did not free any slaves immediately because it applied only to areas behind Confederate lines, outside Union control. Since the Proclamation was a military action aimed at the states in rebellion, it did not apply to Southern territory already occupied by Union troops nor to the slave states that had not seceded.





REACTIONS TO THE PROCLAMATION Although the Proclamation did not have much practical effect, it had immense symbolic importance. For many, the Proclamation gave the war a high moral purpose by turning the struggle into a fight to free the slaves. In Washington, D.C., the Reverend Henry M. Turner, a free-born African American, watched the capital's inhabitants receive the news of emancipation.

A PERSONAL VOICE HENRY M. TURNER

“Men squealed, women fainted, dogs barked, white and colored people shook hands, songs were sung, and by this time cannons began to fire at the navy yard. . . . Great processions of colored and white men marched to and fro and passed in front of the White House. . . . The President came to the window . . . and thousands told him, if he would come out of that palace, they would hug him to death.”

—quoted in *Voices from the Civil War*

Free blacks also welcomed the section of the Proclamation that allowed them to enlist in the Union army. Even though many had volunteered at the beginning of the war, the regular army had refused to take them. Now they could fight and help put an end to slavery.

Not everyone in the North approved of the Emancipation Proclamation, however. The Democrats claimed that it would only prolong the war by antagonizing the South. Many Union soldiers accepted it grudgingly, saying they had no love for abolitionists or African Americans, but they would support emancipation if that was what it took to reunify the nation.

Confederates reacted to the Proclamation with outrage. Jefferson Davis called it the “most execrable [hateful] measure recorded in the history of guilty man.” As Northern Democrats had predicted, the Proclamation had made the Confederacy more determined than ever to fight to preserve its way of life.

After the Emancipation Proclamation, compromise was no longer an option. The Confederacy knew that if it lost, its slave-holding society would perish, and the Union knew that it could win only by completely defeating the Confederacy. From January 1863 on, it was a fight to the death. **B**

KEY PLAYERS



ABRAHAM LINCOLN
1809–1865

Abraham Lincoln was born to illiterate parents, and once said that in his boyhood there was “absolutely nothing to excite ambition for education.” Yet he hungered for knowledge.

He educated himself and, after working as rail-splitter, storekeeper, and surveyor, he taught himself law. This led to a career in politics—and eventually to the White House. In Europe at that time, people were more or less fixed in the station into which they had been born. In the United States, Lincoln was free to achieve whatever he could. Small wonder that he fought to preserve the nation he described as “the last best hope of earth.”



JEFFERSON DAVIS
1808–1889

Jefferson Davis, who was named after Thomas Jefferson, was born in Kentucky and grew up in Mississippi. After graduating from West Point, he served in the army and then became a planter. He was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1846 and again in 1856, resigning when Mississippi seceded.

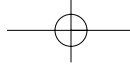
His election as president of the Confederacy dismayed him. As his wife Varina wrote, “I thought his genius was military, but as a party manager he would not succeed.”

Varina was right. Davis had poor relations with many Confederate leaders, causing them to put their states’ welfare above the Confederacy’s.

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Effects

B What effects did the Emancipation Proclamation have on the war?




Both Sides Face Political Problems

Neither side in the Civil War was completely unified. There were Confederate sympathizers in the North, and Union sympathizers in the South. Such divided loyalties created two problems: How should the respective governments handle their critics? How could they ensure a steady supply of fighting men for their armies?

DEALING WITH DISSENT Lincoln dealt forcefully with disloyalty. For example, when a Baltimore crowd attacked a Union regiment a week after Fort Sumter, Lincoln sent federal troops to Maryland. He also suspended in that state the writ of **habeas corpus**, a court order that requires authorities to bring a person held in jail before the court to determine why he or she is being jailed. Lincoln used this same strategy later in the war to deal with dissent in other states. As a result, more than 13,000 suspected Confederate sympathizers in the Union were arrested and held without trial, although most were quickly released. The president also seized telegraph offices to make sure no one used the wires for subversion. When Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger Taney declared that Lincoln had gone beyond his constitutional powers, the president ignored his ruling.

Those arrested included **Copperheads**, or Northern Democrats who advocated peace with the South. Ohio congressman Clement Vallandigham was the most famous Copperhead. Vallandigham was tried and convicted by a military court for urging Union soldiers to desert and for advocating an armistice.

Jefferson Davis at first denounced Lincoln's suspension of civil liberties. Later, however, Davis found it necessary to follow the Union president's example. In 1862, he suspended habeas corpus in the Confederacy.

Lincoln's action in dramatically expanding presidential powers to meet the crises of wartime set a precedent in U.S. history. Since then, some presidents have cited war or "national security" as a reason to expand the powers of the executive branch of government. 

CONSCRIPTION Although both armies originally relied on volunteers, it didn't take long before heavy casualties and widespread desertions led to **conscription**, a draft that would force certain members of the population to serve in the army. The Confederacy passed a draft law in 1862, and the Union followed suit in 1863. Both laws ran into trouble.

The Confederate law drafted all able-bodied white men between the ages of 18 and 35. (In 1864, as the Confederacy suffered more losses, the limits changed to 17 and 50.) However, those who could afford to were allowed to hire substitutes to serve in their places. The law also exempted planters who owned 20 or more slaves. Poor Confederates howled that it was a "rich man's war but a poor man's fight." In spite of these protests, almost 90 percent of eligible Southern men served in the Confederate army.


The Union law drafted white men between 20 and 45 for three years, although it, too, allowed draftees to hire substitutes. It also provided for commutation, or paying a \$300 fee to avoid conscription altogether. In the end, only 46,000 draftees actually went into the army. Ninety-two percent of the approximately 2 million soldiers who served in the Union army were volunteers—180,000 of them African-American.

Background

A **copperhead** is a poisonous snake with natural camouflage.

MAIN IDEA

Evaluating Leadership

 What actions did Lincoln take to deal with dissent?

Vocabulary

commutation: the substitution of one kind of payment for another

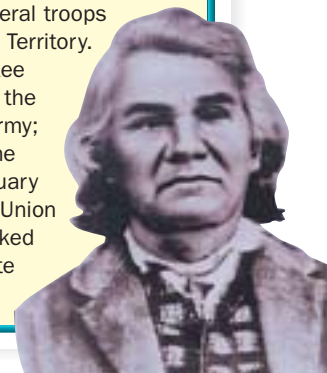
ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

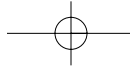
THE CHEROKEE AND THE WAR

Another nation divided by the Civil War was the Cherokee Nation. Both the North and the South wanted the Cherokee on their side. This was because the Cherokee Nation was located in the Indian Territory, an excellent grain- and livestock-producing area. For their part, the Cherokee felt drawn to both sides—to the Union because federal treaties guaranteed Cherokee rights, and to the Confederacy because many Cherokee owned slaves.

The Cherokee signed a treaty with the South in October 1861. However, the alliance did not last. Efforts by the pro-Confederate leader Stand Watie (*below*) to govern the Cherokee Nation failed, and federal troops invaded Indian Territory.

Many Cherokee deserted from the Confederate army; some joined the Union. In February 1863, the pro-Union Cherokee revoked the Confederate treaty.





THE RIOT CONTINUED.
Violence and Pillage.
 General Rioting About the City.
 The Mob Repulsed by the Police and Military.
 LABOR SUSPENDED IN FACTORIES.
 CROCKERS STORES AND SERVICES.
 A Number of the Rioters Supposed to be Killed.
 COL. GREEN BEATEN ALMOST TO DEATH.
 RAILROAD TRAVEL SUSPENDED.
 BARRICKS BUILT IN SEVERAL PLACES.
 Details of the Riot Throughout the City.



DRAFT RIOTS In 1863 New York City was a tinderbox waiting to explode. Poor people were crowded into slums, crime and disease ran rampant, and poverty was ever-present. Poor white workers—especially Irish immigrants—thought it unfair that they should have to fight a war to free slaves. The white workers feared that Southern blacks would come north and compete for jobs. When officials began to draw names for the draft, angry men gathered all over the city to complain.

For four days, July 13–16, mobs rampaged through the city. The rioters wrecked draft offices, Republican newspaper offices, and the homes of antislavery leaders. They attacked well-dressed men on the street (those likely to be able to pay the \$300 commutation fee) and attacked African Americans. By the time federal troops ended the melee, more than 100 persons lay dead.

The draft riots were not the only dramatic development away from the battlefield. Society was also experiencing other types of unrest.

▲ In New York City in July 1863, draft rioters vented their anger on African-American institutions such as this orphanage.

SECTION 2

ASSESSMENT

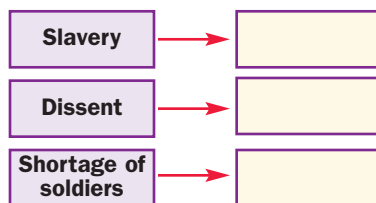
1. TERMS & NAMES For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Emancipation Proclamation
- habeas corpus
- Copperhead
- conscription

MAIN IDEA

2. TAKING NOTES

In a diagram like the one shown, note the political measures that Lincoln took to solve each problem.



CRITICAL THINKING

3. EVALUATING LEADERSHIP

Do you think that Lincoln’s measures to deal with disloyalty and dissent represented an abuse of power? Why or why not? **Think About:**

- conditions of wartime versus peacetime
- Lincoln’s primary goal
- Supreme Court Justice Roger Taney’s view of Lincoln’s powers

4. ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES

“To fight against slaveholders, without fighting against slavery, is but a half-hearted business, and paralyzes the hands engaged in it.”

—Frederick Douglass, quoted in *Battle Cry of Freedom*

How do you think Lincoln would have replied to Douglass?