

“That on the 1st day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, 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, henceforth and forever free. . . .”

This paragraph is taken from the Emancipation Proclamation. On January 1, 1863, in the middle of a civil war, President Abraham Lincoln signed this document. It was one of the greatest turning points in United States history.

A Strategic Move

President Lincoln’s primary goal was to keep the United States together. Weakening the rebelling Southern states’ ability to wage war was important in achieving this goal. The Confederate states’ economies depended on millions of enslaved people working on farms and for businesses. Lincoln realized that without their unpaid labor, the South would have a much harder time fighting the war. He called the proclamation “a fit and necessary war measure for suppressing said rebellion.”



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President Lincoln, surrounded by his cabinet, signs the Emancipation Proclamation.

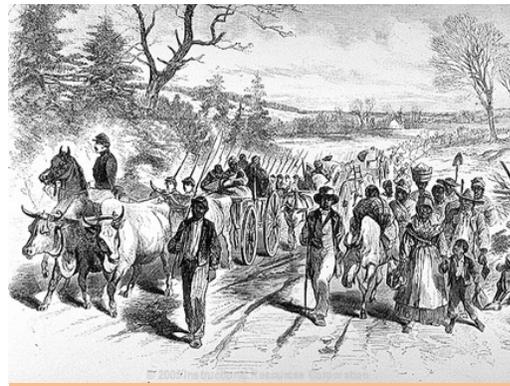
Declaring freedom for enslaved people also shook Confederate leaders and Southern slave owners. They feared that their labor force was going to disappear and that more than three million people would become free to take sides. Would ex-slaves side with their Confederate oppressors? It seemed more likely that they would support the Union. Would their newfound freedom bring violence and destruction within the South? Lincoln knew that waging war is as much a psychological battle as a military battle. With one move, he was able to strike on both fronts.

It is important to note that the Emancipation Proclamation only granted freedom to enslaved people in the states that were rebelling. It did not make slavery itself illegal. All enslaved people throughout the nation would not be legally free until 1865, when the Thirteenth Amendment, which outlawed slavery, was ratified.

A Greater Union

Millions of formerly enslaved people were now free, and the Union army found itself with a wave of volunteers. Many newly freed people did not have anywhere to live or any way of making a living. The army provided both. Another advantage of serving in the military was the pride and dignity it provided to people who had been deprived of both for their entire lives. In addition, the majority of newly freed people did not know how to read or write. Educated soldiers sometimes found time and resources to teach reading and writing to those in need.

Army units were segregated, or separated by race, and African American units were under the command of white officers. Living conditions for African Americans in the army were not equal to those for others, and neither was the pay. Many were happy to serve the Union that had freed them. Inequality persisted, however.



Many newly freed people decided to join the Union army.

Another way that the Emancipation Proclamation strengthened the Union was by generating support for the eventual complete abolition, or outlawing, of slavery. There were still many enslaved people within the areas not affected by the proclamation. Still, many abolitionists celebrated the president's decision. They knew that the announcement would not fully eliminate slavery immediately, but they rejoiced at the beginning of its end.

No Help from Europe

The last thing the Northern states needed was to have European countries, including Great Britain and France, join the war on the side of the Confederacy. These two countries had already expressed sympathy with the Southern states on other issues besides slavery, and they seemed ready to assist the South with supplies and manpower. President Lincoln knew that Great Britain and France strongly opposed slavery. Declaring support for the South made any ally of the Confederacy appear to support slavery. As Lincoln hoped, Great Britain and France declined to support the South because of the attention the proclamation brought to the issue of slavery.

The Emancipation Proclamation achieved what President Lincoln hoped it would do. It made it harder for the South to wage war, and it strengthened Union forces. It also ensured that the South would have no allies from other countries. January 1, 1863, was also a day of celebration. It marked the beginning of an end to slavery and illustrated the power of a determined president. It is truly a turning point to remember.

After reading the passage, answer the following questions:

1. Which statement about the Emancipation Proclamation is true?
 - A. It outlawed slavery in all states.
 - B. It outlawed slavery in the Northern states.
 - C. It forced three million people to join the Union army.
 - D. It granted freedom to enslaved people in the Southern states.
2. What happened to the Union army after the proclamation?
 - A. It lost half its soldiers.
 - B. It gained many new soldiers.
 - C. It retreated back to the South.
 - D. It retreated back to Washington, DC.
3. Why did countries in Europe not support the Confederacy?
 - A. They did not want to support slavery.
 - B. They knew that the South would lose.
 - C. The Northern states threatened to attack France.
 - D. The Southern states did not want any outside support.
4. The Emancipation Proclamation greatly affected the lives of enslaved people in the rebelling states. Lincoln used the Emancipation Proclamation to serve several purposes, however. How did these other purposes affect the course of the Civil War? Provide details from the text to support your answer.