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*Doctoral student

Houdegbe North American University

Benin

°Associate Professor

English Department

Abomey – Calavi University

cbyehoue@yahoo.fr

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Université de Koudougou

Burkina Faso

malooumar@yahoo.fr

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paliest@gmail.com

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FLASH

Université d'Abomey-Calavi

vincentdjim65q@yahoo.fr

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Bouaké / Côte d'Ivoire

ahidjezahuitoti@yahoo.fr

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Maître-Assistant

Département de sociologie

Université de Lomé

Kgbemou2000@yahoo.fr

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Université d'Abomey-Calavi

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Maître de Conférences

Village Français du Nigeria, Ajara-Badagry, Lagos / Nigeria

Centre Interuniversitaire des Etudes Françaises

dradeniyiemmanuel@yahoo.com edradeniyi@yahoo.com

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Department of European Studies

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amosiyiola2013@yahoo.com

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Dr. Estelle BANKOLE MINAFLINOU.

Maitre-Assistant

Département d'Anglais

FLASH/ Université d'Abomey-Calavi

bankestelle@yahoo.fr

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Abraham Lincoln: an Abolitionist or a Clever Politician?

Dr. Ferdinand KPOHOUE

Assistant

Département d'Anglais

Université d'Abomey - Calavi.

ferdinandkpo@yahoo.fr

Abstract

Abraham Lincoln, the sixteenth President of the United States, is famous because he succeeded in putting an end to slavery in America with the Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863. The main objective of this paper is to examine the ideas behind the Emancipation Proclamation. As a matter of fact, Abraham Lincoln's position with regard to slavery and the problem of race is ambiguous and his actions to put an end to it in the US seemed more strategic than a conviction to challenge a system which was contradictory to the Declaration of Independence which mentions clearly that "All men are created equal." This ambiguous position can be attributed either to his family background, his late contact with slavery or his political ambition. Whatever the case may be, it is undeniable that his Emancipation Proclamation opened the way to all the different processes that led to end officially segregation in force. The American Constitution of 1787 mentions nowhere the words 'slaves' or 'slavery' though section 9 refers to 'migration or Importation of Persons' to allude to slaves. The study analyses the historical context of the Emancipation Proclamation, the actions carried out by Lincoln in order to investigate clearly the actual side of President Abraham Lincoln. It can also shed light on the very causes of the American Civil War which was another revolution in America.

Keywords: slavery, Abraham Lincoln, Abolitionist, race, Emancipation Proclamation.

Résumé

Abraham Lincoln, seizième président des États-Unis, est célèbre parce qu'il a réussi à mettre fin à l'esclavage en Amérique avec la Proclamation d'émancipation du 1er Janvier 1863

L'objectif principal de cette étude est d'examiner les idées cachées derrière cette Proclamation d'Emancipation. En fait, la position d'Abraham Lincoln à l'égard de l'esclavage et le problème racial est ambiguë et ses actions pour mettre un terme à cela aux États-Unis semblent plus stratégiques que d'une conviction pour contester un système qui était en contradiction avec la Déclaration d'Indépendance qui mentionne clairement que «Tous les hommes sont nés égaux.» Cette position ambiguë peut être attribuée soit à son milieu familial, ses contacts tardifs avec l'esclavage ou de son ambition politique. Quel que soit le cas, il est indéniable que sa proclamation d'émancipation a ouvert la voie à tous les différents processus qui ont conduit à mettre fin officiellement à la ségrégation raciale en vigueur Aux Etats-Unis. La Constitution américaine de 1787 ne mentionne nulle part les mots «esclaves » ou« esclavage ». Seulement l'article 9 fait référence à «la migration ou l'importation des personnes» pour faire allusion aux esclaves.

Cette étude analyse le contexte historique de la Proclamation d'émancipation, les actions menées par Lincoln afin de découvrir clairement le position réelle du président Abraham Lincoln. Il fait également la lumière sur les causes de la guerre de Sécession qui était une autre révolution en Amérique.

Mots-clés: esclavage, Abraham Lincoln, abolitionniste, race, Proclamation d'émancipation.

Introduction

Abraham Lincoln was born in a one-room log cabin on his father's farm near Hogdenville, Kentucky on February 12, 1809 in the South. But his father, Thomas decided to leave Kentucky in 1816 and take his family to the new state of Indiana. In 1830, Thomas decided to move to Macon County, Illinois. Abraham Lincoln was 21 years old. He decided to be a lawyer. He borrowed law books and read them while he held other jobs. When he finished studying the books, he moved to Springfield, Illinois and become a lawyer. In November

1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected President of the United States, and on January 1, 1863 he signed the final draft of the Emancipation Proclamation. For some Americans, Abraham Lincoln remains the Great Emancipator, the man who freed the African-American slaves. For others, Lincoln was an opportunist who lagged behind the abolitionist movement, an advocate of black Americans' voluntary emigration, and even a white supremacist.

This paper undertakes to evaluate Lincoln in the context of his times and of his role in public life as a politician, a pragmatist who subscribed to abolitionist principles but recognized that they could only be achieved in gradual, step-by-step fashion through compromise and negotiation, in pace with progressive changes in public opinion and political realities.

Lincoln assumed that he had always hated slavery as much as any abolitionist in 1858. "I have already disliked slavery. If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong. No man is good enough to govern another man without that man's consent" (Commager 1960: 14) added Abraham Lincoln. But when political opponent Stephen A. Douglas charged that Lincoln favored racial equality, he responded that he had never been in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races. It is difficult to identify Lincoln's actual side about the issue of slavery in America. Anyway, he discovered slavery later and used it as a political tool to become president, then seized the outbreak of the American Civil War opportunity and social pressure to issue the Emancipation Proclamation to free Blacks to preserve the union. Never had he planned to put an end to slavery with Emancipation Proclamation, he supported a gradualist approach as a solution to free Blacks in America. He is but a racist and friend of African American at the same time because his opportunist action opened the way to the freedom of four million African Americans in the 19th century.

I. Abraham Lincoln's childhood and his encounter with slavery

Abraham Lincoln was born in Kentucky on February 12, 1809. Kentucky became a slave state in 1792. By the time Lincoln left Kentucky and moved north across the Ohio River to Indiana (a non-slave territory) in 1816, he had probably learned the alphabet but not much more than that. Indiana, north of the Ohio River, had been part of the Northwest Territory, a vast tract between the Ohio River and the Great Lakes and the Mississippi, which the new republic had won from Britain in the War of Independence. In 1787, in an attempt to organize the process required for a territory to become a state, the Confederation Congress passed the Northwest Ordinance. This legislation stipulated as well that there should be no slavery in the territory.

Abraham Lincoln was about seven in 1816 and was unaware of slavery.

When he was nineteen years old, he was hired by James Gentry, owner of some of the largest farms around Pigeon Creek, to co-steer a flatboat down the Mississippi River to unload produce to be sold at the plantations in the South and to return with the money earned. For these services, Abraham was paid eight dollars a month.

More importantly, these forays into the South opened Abraham's eyes to the world beyond the Indiana frontier and likely begun to shape his views toward the horrors of slavery as he witnessed the auctions and treatment of slaves firsthand:

It was the year 1828. Young Lincoln was just nineteen years old. He and Allen Gentry started off on their journey of a thousand miles down the muddy Ohio and into the broad Mississippi River. They were on their way to New Orleans, the exciting city of the south, with its French and Spanish background.

By day, the two young men guided their boat down the main current of the river. At night they tied up along the shore. On both sides of the Mississippi, Abe Lincoln saw strange sights. Here were Negroes working on the cotton fields, with white men standing by and telling them what to do. He had seen none of this in Indiana. What did it all mean? (Bailey 1960: 48-49)

New Orleans was a good experience for Lincoln:

He also saw colored slaves, fastened in a long line with handcuffs, headed for their work in the cotton fields. He heard talk about buying and selling human beings, Negro men and women who worked on the huge plantations. Abe Lincoln had never before known that such things happened. (Bailey 1960: 52)

In March 1830, a milk sick broke out in the little community. Thomas decided to move to Macon County, Illinois, where John Hanks, one of Nancy's relatives, lived. Now 21, Abraham felt obliged to help his father make the move westward. But in July 1831

Lincoln separated from his Family to settle in the nearby community of New Salem. Lincoln overcame the poverty and isolation of his youth mainly by reading and studying any book that he could find. He was ever willing to learn, to study new facts and to listen to those around him for their opinions. He decided to be a lawyer. He borrowed law books and read them while he held other jobs. He read and studied all the best professors of law of his time: Blackstone, Greenleaf, Chitty and Story. When he finished studying the books, he moved to Springfield, Illinois, and became a lawyer.

Lincoln's childhood was not an easy one and his parents' successive relocations prevented him fortunately or unfortunately from discovering the actual face of slavery at early age. In effect, the rare moments when he got directly into contact with Negro slaves were practically

limited to the two times when he saw them in 1828 and 1830 while transporting goods to New Orleans with a flatboat across the Mississippi. These were the only direct contacts that he had with them. The other times' contacts were not contacts as such; but were limited to the sight that he caught of them through the Capitol's window when he was in US Congress. Therefore his attitude vis-à-vis slaves and the whole system was biased and hold on the leg of the interest each position about the matter offered on the very field of politics. His political ambition took him to speak out his opinion about the criminal bondage imposed on Blacks in America since 1619. But before his political involvement, it is of interest to investigate Lincoln's side with slavery in America.

II. Lincoln's position to Negroes

The problem of the Negroes was a central debate in the nineteenth century in America and people all over the country were taking sides on the matter. The problem was always present but was not so salient. The Declaration of Independence postponed the debate by deleting it from the first draft. But the evil was there, becoming more and more monstrous because the population of Blacks was increasing. Therefore, nobody could skip the debate and be elected at any level of the political life of America. This unavoidable passage took Abraham Lincoln to develop his ideas about slavery.

Early in 1832, Denton Offut closed his store where Lincoln was working. Young Lincoln was jobless, penniless and homeless. Convinced by James Rutledge, he decided to run for the state legislature. The election took place on August 6, 1832 and Lincoln failed. In 1834, he ran again for the state legislature, and this time he was elected at twenty-five.

In 1837, he Lincoln was admitted to the Bar, Springfield, Illinois. Abraham Lincoln did speak and even write about slavery seventeen in 1837 precisely, when he was in the Illinois legislature. He wrote a protest against slavery²⁶ with Dan Stone, another Whig member of the same legislature. Their declaration criticized bitterly the system of bondage, depicting it as bad and unjust. They nevertheless deemed that the abolitionists' attitudes could not constitute a valid contribution to the solution of slavery. They considered that Congress by itself was not able to suppress slavery in the South, but that if the voters of the national capital agreed, it could be locally extinguished. In fact, state governors received resolutions and then sent to the state legislatures of the North. In December 1836, the Illinois legislature which was holding its session received the southerners' delegation with the documents, including the resolutions. In early January 1837, the latter had to be voted on by the Illinois House of Representatives.

The resolutions branded abolitionists as dangerous men, affirmed the constitutional right of Southerners to own slaves, and declared that the government couldn't uproot slavery. On March 3, 1837 they presented their protest to the House, which was read and ordered to be spread on the journals. Resolutions upon the subject of domestic slavery were rejected by Daniel Stone and Abraham Lincoln. They believed that the institution of slavery is founded on both injustice and bad policy; but that the promulgation of abolition doctrines tends rather to increase than to abate its evils. They insisted that the Congress of the United States has the power, under the constitution, to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia; but that that power ought not to be exercised unless at the request of the people of said District. They believed that the Congress of the United States has no power, under the constitution, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the different States. He, together with his political mate, played a political trick in favor of the Whig party. Lincoln was known for his gradualism and separatism over the end of slavery in America.

1. Gradualism

Just after the revolutionary war ended, the institution of slavery in the North started to change. Slavery peaked in New Haven and in Connecticut during the 1780s.

In 1784, Gradual Emancipation was passed in Connecticut (and Rhode Island). This law was intended to phase out slavery, and would become the primary mechanism of abolition throughout New England. In Connecticut, it worked like this: All slaves born on or after March 1, 1784, remained bonded while children, but were released upon reaching a certain age (first 25, later reduced to 21). All slaves born before 1784 remained slaves for life. This allowed slavery to slowly disappear Lincoln's advocacy of colonization was direct and honest: He wanted blacks to leave the country and tried to talk them into doing so. Exactly one month before the Emancipation Proclamation was to go into effect, December 1, 1862, Lincoln sent his Second Annual Message to Congress. The message itself began with routine reports from cabinet officers, and then Lincoln picked up the baton. He began with an elegant description of why the Union had to be united, quoting paragraphs from his First Inaugural, and then showing how the nation was united physically and economically. Only the ideas of the time divided the nation, he implied, and they might be changed in a generation. Then he turned to the question of slavery in the nation. He proposed a plan for gradual, compensated emancipation with colonization, and demonstrated how his plan would be far less costly fiscally than the estimated cost of the war. To that end he proposed three constitutional

amendments. Then he turned to the question of how African Americans could fit into a free society. This was essentially an argument that blacks, even those not colonized, would not threaten white society once slavery ended. Blacks would stay in the South, which was made congenial by climate, familiarity, and their longtime commitment of their labor. They would not take white jobs; if they stayed where they were, they would, said Lincoln, "jostle no white laborers; if they leave their old places, they leave them open to white laborers." And even if they moved into new places, surely their numbers were so small compared to the white population that no white person would be threatened. The duration of that gradual process was supposed to last as long as 37 years. This means that many slaves who were then held in bondage would have died, thus failing to enjoy the measure of freedom that had been planned for them. On that point, Lincoln answered that their children would enjoy it.

The plan that Lincoln was pleading for was not the Emancipation Proclamation, nor a plan to arm the slaves to fight for their own freedom and the Union. It was a passionate defense of the three constitutional amendments that Lincoln proposed to the Congress. Together they were Lincoln's plan for gradual, compensated emancipation with colonization.

The first amendment offered compensation to every slave state that would abolish slavery by "the year of our Lord one thousand and nine hundred" (thirty-eight years, more than a generation). The government would pay the states in interest-bearing bonds for every slave freed at the time he or she was freed. But, if any state reintroduced slavery, it would have to refund the bonds and the interest to the federal government. The second amendment compensated the loyal owners of slaves who had gained freedom "by the chances of war." This offered repayment for the loss of property when slaves freed themselves by escaping to Union lines. The third amendment said that "Congress may appropriate money and otherwise provide, for colonizing free colored persons, with their own consent, at any place or places without the United States."

To modern eyes the contrast between Lincoln's eloquence and the three proposed amendments is stark. The amendments include the possibility, even the likelihood, that some states would keep slavery for more than a generation. More surprising still is the possibility that states might renege on emancipation if they were willing to return the compensation they had been given. Furthermore, the idea of compensation seemed to many people at the time to concede the premises of slavery—slaves were pieces of property. Then there was the colonization proposal, which most blacks (though not all—remember Martin Delany, Henry Highland Garnet, and one of Frederick Douglass' sons) rejected as endorsing the racist idea that they

could not live beside whites but that, even after making southern lands productive, they would have to leave the land of their birth. And yet Lincoln spoke of giving freedom to the slave, assuring freedom to the free.

2. The American Colonization Society

The American Colonization Society was founded on December 28, 1816, in Washington, D.C. It promoted the emigration and colonization of free African Americans along the coast of West Africa. It portrayed black emigration as a solution to the growing prevalence of free blacks; a population that many Southern whites feared would disrupt the system of slavery. As the American Colonization Society grew, the prominence of its members and supporters also grew. Among them were Presidents Abraham Lincoln, James Madison, and James Monroe, and United States Supreme Court Justice Bushrod Washington, who was also the organization's first president.

Most black leaders believed that the American Colonization Society was a racist and pro-slavery organization and that black emigration was a ploy to strengthen the grip of slavery. During the senatorial campaign of 1858, a series of debates were initiated. The Debates were a series of seven between Republican Abraham Lincoln and incumbent Democrat Stephen A. Douglas, for an Illinois seat in the United States Senate. Since Senators were elected by state legislatures, Lincoln and Douglas were campaigning for their respective parties to win control of the Illinois legislature. The debates previewed the issues that the nation would face in the Presidential election of 1860. The main issue discussed was slavery, particularly its role in the territories and impending states. Lincoln, in answer to his challenger Stephen Douglas, dropped a declaration which could indicate that he was racist to some extent. To Stephen Douglas who condemned the idea of marriage between whites and blacks as amalgamation, Lincoln enthusiastically replied:

I have no purpose to introduce political and social equality between the white and black races.

There is a physical difference between the two, which in my judgment, will probably forever forbid their living together upon the footing of perfect equality ; and inasmuch as it becomes a necessity that there must be a difference, I as well as Judge Douglas, am in favor of the race to which I belong having the superior position. I have never said anything to the contrary, but I hold that notwithstanding all this, there is no reason in the world why the negro is not entitled to all the natural rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence – the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. I hold that he is not as much entitled to these as the white man. I agree with Judge Douglas he is not my equal in many respects – certainly not in color, perhaps not in moral or intellectual endowment. But in the right to eat the

bread, without the leave of anybody else, which his own hand earns, he is my equal and the equal of Judge Douglas, and the equal of every living man. (Commager 1973 : 404).

During the first debate which took place in Ottawa, Illinois, Lincoln was unambiguous about the problem of equality between Blacks and whites. He recognized that somewhere both races are equal, but once more he was just playing a political game , telling people what they wanted to hear in order to be admired by both pros and cons slavery. He could take profit of some other opportunities to express his hatred for the black race.

During the same senatorial campaign of 1858, Lincoln, in answer to his challenger Stephen Douglas, dropped a declaration which could indicate that he was racist to some extent. To Stephen Douglas who condemned the idea of marriage between whites and blacks as amalgamation, Lincoln enthusiastically replied: *“Agreed for once, a thousand times agreed. There was a natural disgust among nearly all whites at the idea of racial amalgamation”* (Commager 1973: 404).

He added that he and the Republican Party were opposed to the said racial amalgamation.

On other occasion, while presenting his bill about the compensated emancipation to Congress in July 1862, Abraham Lincoln dropped a phrase which could indicate that he was not totally different from the lot of other white people in the field of anti-Negro racism or prejudices. In the said message, Abraham Lincoln considered slaves as property, and even as a vulgar property. Nowhere in the document was it indicated that such appellation was transient or improper, or even likely to be criticized or corrected. But the term “property” was used many times and without any linguistic caution. Worse, Lincoln seemed to indicate that they were property “as any other property” (Commager 1973: 404). The latter phrase, which was not indispensable to understand the whole of his message, placed the Negroes on the same level as any base kind of object. It is true that in July 1862 when he wrote the said message, his mind was haunted by many concerns, including the war and other subsequent issues, which could make it necessary to excuse him for points of detail in such a complex message, but unfortunately, it is not a detail to call man a property, still less “any kind of property”.

Lincoln does not seem to have totally escaped the trap of ambient racism that prevailed against Negroes. Man being somewhat the product of his time and of his society, he was, to some extent, at its image: he was racist.

As Frederick Douglass finally wrote “President Lincoln was a white man, and shared the prejudices common to his countrymen towards the colored race”. Southerners sometimes used

that aspect of his life, either to make him unpopular while alive, or to lessen his fame after his death.

Thus, D.W. Griffith, the son of a Confederate cavalryman, took pleasure in depicting that racist image of Abraham Lincoln. His epic motion picture titled “the Birth of a Nation” thus put a strong stress on the passage of Lincoln’s speech which upheld such ideas as Negroes’ inferiority to whites and Negroes’ unworthiness of the right to vote (Oates 1973: 24). In the same way, when Martin Luther King made his famous “I have a dream speech” before Lincoln’s memorial monument and eulogized the author of the Emancipation Proclamation, a myriad of letters were sent to him by Southerners who disagreed with the orator and claimed that Lincoln also was a racist³¹. They were not totally wrong. What they failed to do nevertheless was that they should also share Lincoln’s antislavery ideas to be consistent with their own analysis.

Realistically speaking however, it appears rather clearly that Lincoln did not believe in the social or political equality of African Americans and white people. Surely, on the basis of the Declaration of Independence, but for the white/black racial relation, Lincoln did not consider that the said equality could be observed. In his view, such equality was to be restricted to its minimal expression. The most important idea that is inferred from Lincoln’s position was that whites are somewhat superior and that it did not necessarily include, at least in a first period, the right to vote.

This point of view seems to be in contrast with the Emancipation Proclamation which opened the way to the freedom of about four millions Blacks in America. No contrast, Abraham Lincoln had no intention to end slavery, his commitment was to save the union as he mentioned on August 22, 1862 in a passage of his letter to Horace Greeley, who had accused him of being indifferent to the situation of the slaves as he seemingly didn’t bother to free them. The said passage reads:

My paramount objet in this struggle, [Lincoln wrote], is to save the Union, and is not either to save or destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that. What I do about slavery and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union: and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union (Lincoln 1970: 17).

He aimed at safeguarding the Union. In his inaugural address he had made it clear that he

believed “the Union of these states is perpetual” and that he would do his best to preserve that Union. Lincoln’s attitudes clearly distinguished him from abolitionists although he openly advocated for the abolition of slavery by acknowledging the rights of slaves. Were it not for the effects brought by the civil war, Lincoln had done nothing to end slavery. Instead, he cited that the Constitution had the authority to protect slavery but not the president. If Lincoln was an abolitionist, he could have denounced the constitutional authority of protecting slavery by repudiating it. True abolitionists were more concerned with ending slavery in all regions but Lincoln’s agenda during his run to office in 1860 promised not to disturb slavery in regions where it existed. Lincoln also believed that as the president, he was constitutionally bound not to deal with issues relating to slavery. The question comes to the mind to know the fundamental reasons behind the Emancipation Proclamation.

III. The Emancipation Proclamation

In June 1862, Congress passed a law prohibiting slavery in the territories. On January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the final form of his Emancipation Proclamation during the American Civil War (1861-1865), it signaled the government's commitment to ending slavery but no slave became free immediately because it applied only to areas behind Confederate military lines. It did not apply to Confederate territories already occupied by Union forces, nor did it apply to Confederate territories already occupied by Union.

Lincoln had adamantly opposed slavery throughout his political career, although he was a proponent of the controversial colonization movement, which encouraged the emigration of free African Americans to West Africa. In addition, his Republican Party had been formed in 1854 to oppose the expansion of slavery. However, ending slavery was not one of the Lincoln administration's initial war aims. Instead he sought to "save the Union, and not either to save or destroy slavery." As president, Lincoln had sworn to uphold the Constitution; the Supreme Court had affirmed the constitutionality of slavery in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857). As Southern states seceded, Lincoln had serious concerns about keeping the four border states—Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri—in the Union and about the loyalty of Northern Democrats, who were sympathetic to the South, where the Democratic Party was dominant. Also, he had promised slaveholders who were loyal to the federal government that they would be able to keep their slaves. Lincoln had first attempted to convince slaveholders in the Border States to eliminate slavery gradually in return for compensation, but the slaveholders refused.

Lincoln's commitment to winning the war led him by 1862 to see emancipation as a necessity because he realized that slaves were a vital component of the Southern economy and that freeing slaves would destabilize the South. Thus in July 1862, Congress passed two laws regarding slaves. The first was a confiscation act that freed slaves from owners who had rebelled against the United States. The second was a militia act that enabled the president to use freed slaves and free blacks in the army. In this context, Lincoln was prepared to use presidential war powers to emancipate slaves in the rebel states.

The Radical Republicans were the most avid abolitionists in government. They were continually vocal on the most expedient way of eliminating slavery. They believed that the end of slavery would be the end of the Confederacy (rather than Lincoln's opposite view). And they were Lincoln's political base. The Radicals became active in the District supporting abolition speeches, encouraging African American activism, and personally confronting the president.

Early in the war, Union officers had begun returning runaway slaves who had come into their lines for protection. This outraged the Radicals. In May 1861, Gen. Ben Butler created a precedent at Fort Monroe by declaring that slaves who had been used by the southern military and who came into the possession of Union troops would be considered "contraband of war," and not returned.

Lincoln conceded that this rationale made sense and looked to expand the principle through a series of Confiscation Acts. Gen. John Fremont declared emancipation in Missouri on August 30, 1861, without consulting Lincoln. He asked Fremont to retract it. Fremont refused, so Lincoln rescinded it and fired him. Expectations were dashed and the Radical pressure increased. By December, the Radicals could wait no longer. Sen. Henry Wilson (MA), introduced a bill for D.C. emancipation. They made it clear to the president that their patience was limited.

The next assault on Lincoln's policy was from an unlikely source. Gen. David Hunter was a family friend of Lincoln's from Illinois. In command of the union enclave at Beaufort S.C., Hunter issued an emancipation proclamation for his military district in the south on May 19, 1862. Once again, the President had to react by ordering a retraction.

Within the District, the campaign for emancipation was accelerating. The black churches were alive to a new activism that involved large groups of people who would surround slave hunters in town, and pack court rooms when hearings were held on slave return demands. The National Republican newspaper ran a series of stories on the success and progress of the

African American community in the District during the final two weeks of congressional debates. The Senate approved the bill on April 3, 1862. The House followed on April 12, and sent the bill to the President. Lincoln showed that he was in no hurry to sign it.

When he did sign the bill two days later, he expressed appreciation that two of his prerequisite principles were included; compensation and colonization. But clearly, he was not quite satisfied that the measure was “expedient.” The bill was not “voluntary” and was not “gradual.” These were two of his key requirements that he believed would help prevent the Border States from swinging over to the Confederacy. He may seriously have weighed the consequences if he should veto the D.C. Emancipation bill. But the bill was now accepted by a majority of the Congress. It was a position that he had long worked for and was a symbol of his hopes for the nation. The Radicals and the African American community of the District had put him way out on a political limb. He decided then that the ultimate issue had to be quickly decided or he would lose both Kentucky and his political base; lose what had differentiated the Union cause in the mind of the international community; and lose the confidence of the entire black race.

In June, Lincoln begins to write out the concepts of emancipation in a way that will speed the end of the war. He drafted what he hoped would be an acceptable final effort at compensated emancipation which will be proposed as legislation on July 14, 1862, but will receive no action in Congress. He composed a lengthy letter to put his best case for a gradual, compensated emancipation plan in front of the Border States representatives before Congress adjourns for the summer. The President is told that they won't consider it. Even little Delaware, with the fewest slaves of any state, won't cooperate. July 13, 1861, Lincoln used the opportunity of a carriage ride with two of his cabinet to confide that he intends to emancipate the slaves by proclamation. He told Secretaries Welles and Seward that “he had given it much thought and had come to the conclusion that it was a military necessity:

It had got to be midsummer, 1862. Things had gone on from bad to worst, 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 our tactics or lose the game! On July 22, the President read the first draft of the Emancipation Proclamation to his full cabinet. (Cmmager 1973: 55)

Although the primary issue was slavery, when the war began, Lincoln was hesitant about immediate freeing the slaves. His main concern was to bring the South back into the nation, and he believed that moving against slavery too quickly would annoy the South. He was

strongly criticized by many for not taking an immediate stand, but he was a politician. The timing of emancipation was important. The Union Army suffered defeats at the beginning of the war, and several of Lincoln's advisers thought a declaration would be nothing but a weak cry from the losing side. Lincoln waited, and criticisms of his hesitancy mounted. Finally, after the battle at Antietam and the retreat of the Confederate army to the South, he released the draft of the proclamation. He issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, declaring that slaves in all states and portions of states still at war with the federal government were free and would remain so. While taking care to exempt border slave states and the three Confederate states that the Union controlled, Lincoln nevertheless endorsed the idea of recruiting freed slaves and free blacks for service in the armed forces. The Emancipation Proclamation technically freed no one, because Lincoln's authority was not recognized in the Confederacy. But the proclamation commanded the Union Army to free any slaves in Confederate territory that came under its control from that point on.

Many Republican Party members recognized that the proclamation was only a war measure that might have no lasting impact on the institution of slavery. Still, its effect was to signal the federal government's opposition to slavery and to bolster the cause of abolitionism in the United States. The war ceased to be one aimed only at saving the Union and became a war to end slavery as well. An initial stream of escaping slaves slowly expanded to become a flood of runaways. In response to the proclamation's endorsement of black military enlistment, more than 180,000 blacks enrolled in the army and 10,000 in the navy by the end of the war. Lincoln was at first unsure about the extent of his executive power and whether he had the authority under the Constitution to free the slaves. Eventually he saw this action as a military necessity that fell under his constitutional powers as commander-in-chief. Lincoln also weighed the effect that the proclamation would have on the Union war effort, in a contest that was still more than two years from being concluded. His concerns included the loyalty of Border States such as Maryland and Kentucky, which, even though they held slaves, had not joined the Confederacy. Would the Emancipation Proclamation force those states into the arms of the Confederacy, increasing its manpower and supplies? Lincoln also considered Northern public opinion that supported a war to save the Union but not necessarily to free the slaves. After issuing the Emancipation Proclamation, however, the freedom of slaves became a central war aim and Lincoln stood by this position, even risking losing the Election of 1864. In short, the Emancipation Proclamation was based not on a commitment to end slavery, but it was motivated by the social pressure, war and political stratagems. Fearing that the

Emancipation Proclamation might not be legal, Lincoln urged Congress to pass an amendment to the Constitution. The thirteenth Amendment, pushed through Congress and ratified by 27 states in December 1865, became a part of the Constitution in 1865.

Conclusion

The Emancipation Proclamation was the result of many months of thought and planning. Lincoln tried to avoid outright emancipation through rewards to encourage states, especially the Border States, to free the slaves on their own. Lincoln repeatedly offered a system of compensated, gradual emancipation and colonization of freed slaves. The Emancipation Proclamation was the final step in what had been a series of military and government orders regarding slaves and runaways. Lincoln did not enter office with the intention of freeing the slaves, but both blacks and whites urged him to do so through their actions. Letters pressing Lincoln to abolish slavery and enlist freed slaves into the Union army arrived daily. By about the middle of 1862, after months of consideration, Lincoln had decided to free the slaves, determining that it was necessary to save the Union. It is true that Lincoln never intended to emancipate the Negro; what he intended was to emancipate the American republic from the curse of slavery. Lincoln told a Washington D.C. lawyer that, not only did he free the Negro, but also the white man. He acted for the words of the Declaration of Independence to ring true at last. Lincoln proved clever enough to guess the direction of the wind, to change strategy when necessary, and to play successfully the political game. He was reelected in 1865 but was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth on April 14, 1865 at Ford's Theatre.

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