

RESOURCES

Online images of original *Emancipation Proclamation*: <https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured-documents/emancipation-proclamation>

History and Background from the National Archives:

The Emancipation Proclamation

President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, as the nation approached its third year of bloody civil war. The proclamation declared «that all persons held as slaves» within the rebellious states «are, and henceforward shall be free.»

Despite this expansive wording, the Emancipation Proclamation was limited in many ways. It applied only to states that had seceded from the United States, leaving slavery untouched in the loyal border states. It also expressly exempted parts of the Confederacy (the Southern secessionist states) that had already come under Northern control. Most important, the freedom it promised depended upon Union (United States) military victory.

Although the Emancipation Proclamation did not end slavery in the nation, it captured the hearts and imagination of millions of Americans and fundamentally transformed the character of the war. After January 1, 1863, every advance of federal troops expanded the domain of freedom. Moreover, the Proclamation announced the acceptance of black men into the Union Army and Navy, enabling the liberated to become liberators. By the end of the war, almost 200,000 black soldiers and sailors had fought for the Union and freedom.

From the first days of the Civil War, slaves had acted to secure their own liberty. The Emancipation Proclamation confirmed their insistence that the war for the Union must become a war for freedom. It added moral force to the Union cause and strengthened the Union both militarily and politically. As a milestone along the road to slavery's final destruction, the Emancipation Proclamation has assumed a place among the great documents of human freedom.

The original of the Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863, is in the National Archives in Washington, DC. With the text covering five pages the document was originally tied with narrow red and blue ribbons, which were attached to the signature page by a wafered impression of the seal of the United States. Most of the ribbon remains; parts of the seal are still decipherable, but other parts have worn off.

The document was bound with other proclamations in a large volume preserved for many years by the Department of State. When it was prepared for binding, it was reinforced with strips along the center folds and then mounted on a still larger sheet of heavy paper. Written in red ink on the upper right-hand corner of this large sheet is the number of the Proclamation, 95, given to it by the Department of State long after it was signed. With other records, the volume containing the Emancipation Proclamation was transferred in 1936 from the Department of State to the National Archives of the United States.

Transcript of the Emancipation Proclamation

January 1, 1863

A Transcription

By the President of the United States of America:

A Proclamation.

Whereas, on the twenty-second day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-two, a proclamation was issued by the President of the United States, containing, among other things, the following, to wit:

“That on the first 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, thenceforward, and forever free; and the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom.

“That the Executive will, on the first day of January aforesaid, by proclamation, designate the States and parts of States, if any, in which the people thereof, respectively, shall then be in rebellion against the United States; and the fact that any State, or the people thereof, shall on that day be, in good faith, represented in the Congress of the United States by members chosen thereto at elections wherein a majority of the qualified voters of such State shall have participated, shall, in the absence of strong countervailing testimony, be deemed conclusive evidence that such State, and the people thereof, are not then in rebellion against the United States.”

Now, therefore I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, by virtue of the power in me vested as Commander-in-Chief, of the Army and Navy of the United States in time of actual armed rebellion against the authority and government of the United States, and as a fit and necessary war measure for suppressing said rebellion, do, on this first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and in accordance with my purpose so to do publicly proclaimed for the full period of one hundred days, from the day first above mentioned, order and designate as the States and parts of States wherein the people thereof respectively, are this day in rebellion against the United States, the following, to wit:

Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, (except the Parishes of St. Bernard, Plaquemines, Jefferson, St. John, St. Charles, St. James Ascension, Assumption, Terrebonne, Lafourche, St. Mary, St. Martin, and Orleans, including the City of New Orleans) Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia, (except the forty-eight counties designated as West Virginia, and also the counties of Berkley, Accomac, Northampton, Elizabeth City, York, Princess Ann, and Norfolk, including the cities of Norfolk and Portsmouth[]), and which excepted parts, are for the present, left precisely as if this proclamation were not issued.

And by virtue of the power, and for the purpose aforesaid, I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States, and parts of States, are, and henceforward shall be free; and that the Executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons.

And I hereby enjoin upon the people so declared to be free to abstain from all violence, unless in necessary self-defence; and I recommend to them that, in all cases when allowed, they labor faithfully for reasonable wages.

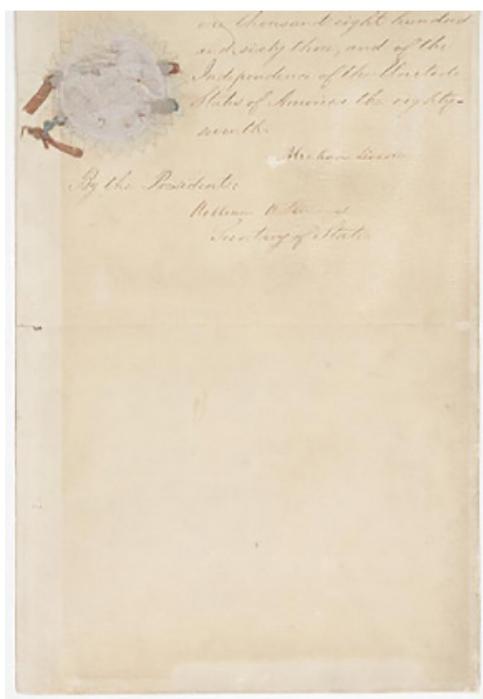
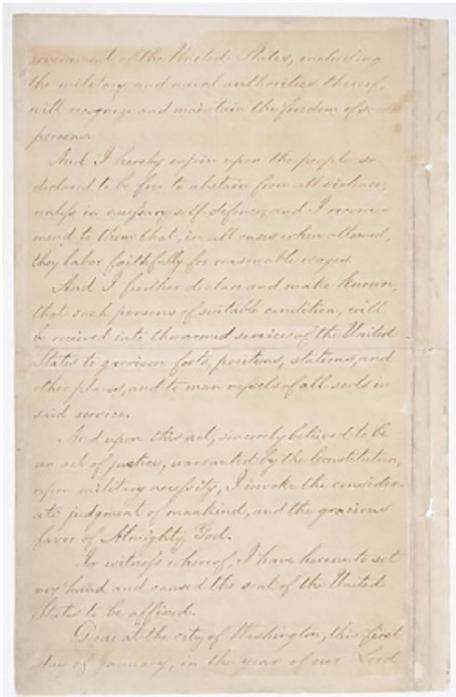
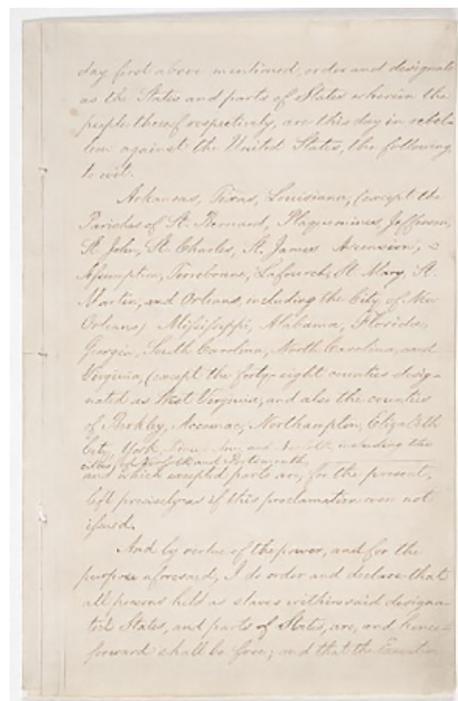
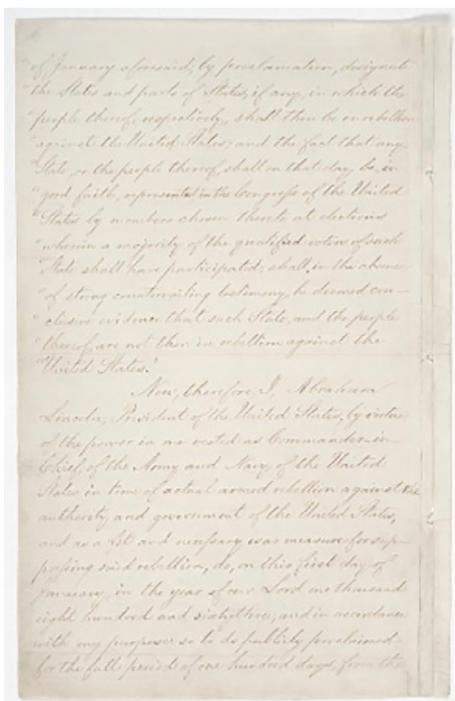
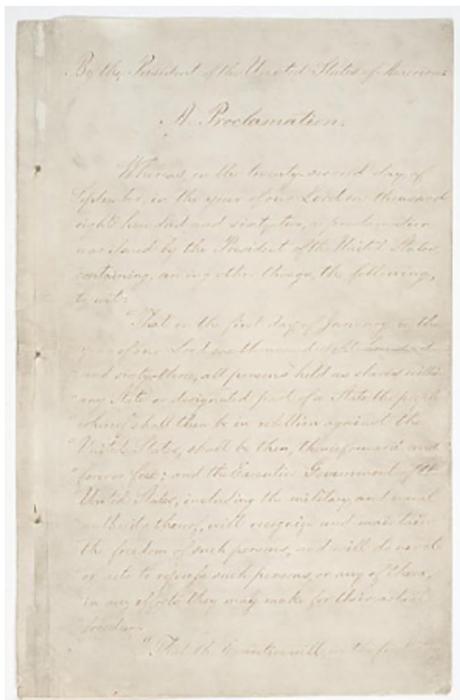
And I further declare and make known, that such persons of suitable condition, will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service.

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.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the City of Washington, this first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty three, and of the Independence of the United States of America the eighty-seventh.

By the President: ABRAHAM LINCOLN
WILLIAM H. SEWARD, Secretary of State.



The Emancipation Proclamation
(pages 1 - 5)

Record Group 11

General Records of the
United States of America

Courtesy of the National Archives

Account of President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation being read to the residents and troops of Beaufort, South Carolina:

Camp Saxton, near Beaufort, South Carolina, January 1, 1863 (evening).

A happy New Year to civilized people,—mere white folks. Our festival has come and gone, with perfect success, and our good General has been altogether satisfied. Last night the great fires were kept smouldering in the pit, and the beeves were cooked more or less, chiefly more,—during which time they had to be carefully watched, and the great spits turned by main force. Happy were the merry fellows who were permitted to sit up all night, and watch the glimmering flames that threw a thousand fantastic shadows among the great gnarled oaks. And such a chattering as I was sure to hear whenever I awoke that night!

My first greeting to-day was from one of the most stylish sergeants, who approached me with the following little speech, evidently the result of some elaboration:—

"I tink myself happy, dis New Year's Day, for salute my own Cunnel. Dis day las' year I was servant to a Gunnel ob Secesh; but now I hab de privilege for salute my own Cunnel."

That officer, with the utmost sincerity, reciprocated the sentiment.

About ten o'clock the people began to collect by land, and also by water,—in steamers sent by General Saxton for the purpose; and from that time all the avenues of approach were thronged. The multitude were chiefly colored women, with gay handkerchiefs on their heads, and a sprinkling of men, with that peculiarly respectable look which these people always have on Sundays and holidays. There were many white visitors also,—ladies on horseback and in carriages, superintendents and teachers, officers, and cavalry-men. Our companies were marched to the neighborhood of the platform, and allowed to sit or stand, as at the Sunday services; the platform was occupied by ladies and dignitaries, and by the band of the Eighth Maine, which kindly volunteered for the occasion; the colored people filled up all the vacant openings in the beautiful grove around, and there was a cordon of mounted visitors beyond. Above, the great live-oak branches and their trailing moss; beyond the people, a glimpse of the blue river.

The services began at half past eleven o'clock, with prayer by our chaplain, Mr. Fowler, who is always, on such occasions, simple, reverential, and impressive. Then the President's Proclamation was read by Dr. W. H. Brisbane, a thing infinitely appropriate, a South Carolinian addressing South Carolinians; for he was reared among these very islands, and here long since emancipated his own slaves. Then the colors were presented to us by the Rev. Mr. French, a chaplain who brought them from the donors in New York. All this was according to the programme. Then followed an incident so simple, so touching, so utterly unexpected and startling, that I can scarcely believe it on recalling, though it gave the keynote to the whole day. The very moment the speaker had ceased, and just as I took and waved the flag, which now for the first time meant anything to these poor people, there suddenly arose, close beside the platform, a strong male voice (but rather cracked and elderly), into which two women's voices instantly blended, singing, as if by an impulse that could no more be repressed than the morning note of the song-sparrow.—

*"My Country, 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of liberty,
Of thee I sing!"*

People looked at each other, and then at us on the platform, to see whence came this interruption, not set down in the bills. Firmly and irrepressibly the quavering voices sang on, verse after verse; others of the colored people joined in; some whites on the platform began, but I motioned them to silence. I never saw anything so electric; it made all other words cheap; it seemed the choked voice of a race at last unloosed. Nothing could be more wonderfully unconscious; art could not have dreamed of a tribute to the day of jubilee that should be so affecting; history will not believe it; and when I came to speak of it, after it was ended, tears were everywhere. If you could have heard how quaint and innocent it was! Old Tiff and his children might have sung it; and close before me was a little slave-boy, almost white, who seemed to belong to the party, and even he must join in. Just think of it!—the first day they had ever had a country, the first flag they had ever seen which promised anything to their people, and here, while mere spectators stood in silence, waiting for my stupid words, these simple souls burst out in their lay, as if they were by their own hearths at home! When they stopped, there was nothing to do for it but to speak, and I went on; but the life of the whole day was in those unknown people's song.

Receiving the flags, I gave them into the hands of two fine-looking men, jet black, as color-guard, and they also spoke, and very effectively,—Sergeant Prince Rivers and Corporal Robert Sutton. The regiment sang "Marching Along," and then General Saxton spoke, in his own simple, manly way, and Mrs. Francis D. Gage spoke very sensibly to the women, and Judge Stickney, from Florida, added something; then some gentleman sang an ode, and the regiment the John Brown song, and then they went to their beef and molasses. Everything was very orderly, and they seemed to have a very gay time. Most of the visitors had far to go, and so dispersed before dress-parade, though the band stayed to enliven it. In the evening we had letters from home, and General Saxton had a reception at his house, from which I excused myself; and so ended one of the most enthusiastic and happy gatherings I ever knew. The day was perfect, and there was nothing but success.

I forgot to say, that, in the midst of the services, it was announced that General Fremont was appointed Commander-in-Chief,—an announcement which was received with immense cheering, as would have been almost anything else, I verily believe, at that moment of high tide. It was shouted across by the pickets above,—a way in which we often receive news, but not always trustworthy.

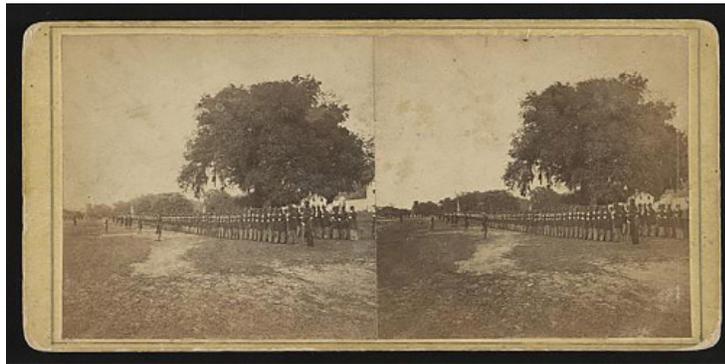
Account of President Lincoln's Second Message of Emancipation being read to the soldiers of the First South Carolina Volunteers:

January 12, 1863.

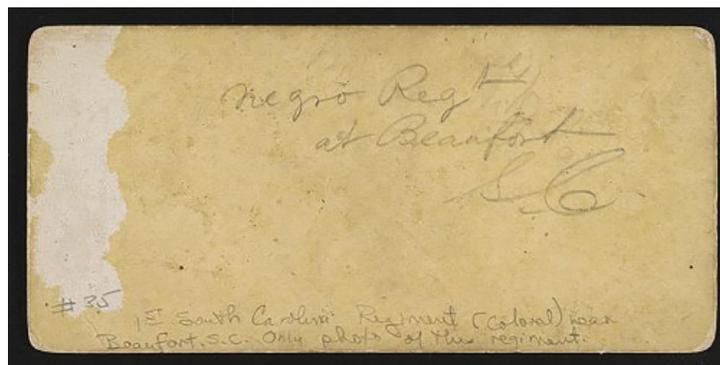
Many things glide by without time to narrate them. On Saturday we had a mail with the President's Second Message of Emancipation, and the next day it was read to the men. The words themselves did not stir them very much, because they have been often told that they were free, especially on New Year's Day, and, being unversed in politics, they do not understand, as well as we do, the importance of each additional guaranty. But the chaplain spoke to them afterwards very effectively, as usual; and then I proposed to them to hold up their hands and pledge themselves to be faithful to those still in bondage. They entered heartily into this, and the scene was quite impressive, beneath the great oak-branches. I heard afterwards that only one man refused to raise his hand, saying bluntly that his wife was out of slavery with him, and he did not care to fight. The other soldiers of his company were very indignant, and shoved him about among them while marching back to their quarters, calling him "Coward." I was glad of their exhibition of feeling, though it is very possible that the one who had thus the moral courage to stand alone among his comrades might be more reliable, on a pinch, than some who yielded a more ready assent. But the whole response, on their part, was very hearty, and will be a good thing to which to hold them hereafter, at any time of discouragement or demoralization,—which was my chief reason for proposing it. With their simple natures it is a great thing to tie them to some definite committal; they never forget a marked occurrence, and never seem disposed to evade a pledge.

The concluding paragraph of book where Higginson reflects on his experience commanding formerly enslaved men:

We who served with the black troops have this peculiar satisfaction, that, whatever dignity or sacredness the memories of the war may have to others, they have more to us. In that contest all the ordinary ties of patriotism were the same, of course, to us as to the rest; they had no motives which we had not, as they have now no memories which are not also ours. But the peculiar privilege of associating with an outcast race, of training it to defend its rights and to perform its duties, this was our especial meed. The vacillating policy of the Government sometimes filled other officers with doubt and shame; until the negro had justice, they were but defending liberty with one hand and crushing it with the other. From this inconsistency we were free. Whatever the Government did, we at least were working in the right direction. If this was not recognized on our side of the lines, we knew that it was admitted on the other. Fighting with ropes round our necks, denied the ordinary courtesies of war till we ourselves compelled them: concession, we could at least turn this outlawry into a compliment. We had touched the pivot of the war. Whether this vast and dusky mass should prove the weakness of the nation or its strength, must depend in great measure, we knew, upon our efforts. Till the blacks were armed, there was no guaranty of their freedom. It was their demeanor under arms that shamed the nation into recognizing them as men.



Only image of the 1st South Carolina Volunteer Regiment
Front of stereo card 1s04441
Courtesy US Library of Congress.



Back side of above image.
Stereo card 1s04441
Courtesy US Library of Congress.

Composer Eric Nathan's interpretation of Colonel Higginson's reflection of his experience:

From *Some Favored Nook* by Eric Nathan

VIII. There suddenly arose

(Diary entry from the evening of January 1, 1863)

HIGGINSON:

The President's Emancipation Proclamation was read.

There suddenly arose

A strong male voice

Cracked and elderly

Into which two women's voices instantly blended,

Singing,

As if by an impulse

That could no more be repressed

Than the morning note of the song - sparrow.

I never saw anything so electric;

It made all other words cheap;

It seemed the choked voice of a race at last unloosed.

After it was ended,

Tears were everywhere.

These souls burst out in their lay, as if they were by their own hearths at home!

ERIC NATHAN

Some Favored Nook

Adapted from texts by Emily Dickinson
And Thomas Wentworth Higginson

For Soprano, Baritone, and Piano

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America, My Country 'Tis of Thee
Lyrics by Samuel Francis Smith, 1831

My country, 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of liberty,
Of thee I sing;
Land where my fathers died,
Land of the pilgrims' pride,
From ev'ry mountainside
Let freedom ring!

My native country, thee,
Land of the noble free,
Thy name I love;
I love thy rocks and rills,
Thy woods and templed hills;
My heart with rapture thrills,
Like that above.

Let music swell the breeze,
And ring from all the trees
Sweet freedom's song;
Let mortal tongues awake;
Let all that breathe partake;
Let rocks their silence break,
The sound prolong.

Our fathers' God to Thee,
Author of liberty,
To Thee we sing.
Long may our land be bright,
With freedom's holy light,
Protect us by Thy might,
Great God our King!

America

My Country, 'Tis of Thee

Samuel Francis Smith, lyrics

British National Anthem, tune

Piano

F C7 F B \flat

My coun - try, 'tis of Thee, Sweet Land of
My na - tive coun - try, thee, Land of the

4 F C7 F

Li - ber - ty Of thee I sing; Land where my
no - ble free, Thy name I love; I love thy

8 C7

fa - thers died, Land of the pil - grims' pride,
rocks and rills, Thy woods and tem - pled hills,

11 F B \flat F C7 F B \flat F C7 F

From ev - 'ry moun - tain side Let Free - dom ring.
My heart with rap - ture thrills Like that a - bove.

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