

Lincoln, the War and Slavery

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A. Letter to Horace Greeley, Editor of New York Tribune, in response to open letter to Lincoln questioning his war aims.

As to the policy I "seem to be pursuing" as you say, I have not meant to leave any one in doubt.

. . . My paramount object in this struggle *is* to save the Union, and is *not* either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing *any* slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing *all* the slaves 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. I shall do *less* whenever I shall believe what I am doing hurts the cause, and I shall do *more* whenever I shall believe doing more will help the cause. I shall try to correct errors when shown to be errors; and I shall adopt new views so fast as they shall appear to be true views.

I have here stated my purpose according to my view of *official* duty; and I intend no modification of my oft-expressed *personal* wish that all men everywhere could be free.

Yours,

A. Lincoln

1. What was Lincoln's principal reason for waging war against the Southern states? What part did slavery play in his war aims?
2. What were Lincoln's personal feelings about slavery?

The Emancipation Proclamation, Jan. 1, 1863

Whereas, on the twenty-second day of September, 1862, 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, 1863, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, where the people shall be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then and forever free. . . ."

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 . . . as a fit and necessary war measure for suppressing said rebellion, on this first day of January, in the year 1863, do publicly . . . designate as the States and parts of States wherein the people thereof are this day in rebellion against the United States, the following:

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 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 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.

1. According to Lincoln, in what states were slaves to be freed? In what states were they not free? Why?
2. Why do you think Lincoln issued a preliminary proclamation, in September, announcing that he would declare slaves to be free on January 1, 1863? Look at the list of states. What state(s) or areas are excluded? Why?
3. How did Lincoln believe former slaves could help the United States?
4. According to Lincoln, what gave him the constitutional authority to issue this proclamation?
5. How do you think the South responded to this proclamation? The North?

Gettysburg Address, Pennsylvania, November 19, 1863

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate -- we can not consecrate -- we can not hallow -- this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

1. What event was Lincoln referring to in the first paragraph?
2. What did Lincoln believe to be the universal meaning or purpose behind the North's efforts to keep the Union together?
3. Other than saving the union, what other purpose does Lincoln see for waging war against the South?
4. Did Lincoln's war aims change from August 1862 to November 1863? Explain.