

LESSON 1: POLICIES TOWARD AFRICAN AMERICANS

Student Handout 4: Outcomes

For Decision 4, President Lincoln switched to Option 3: abolishing slavery in those states in rebellion against the Union (but not in the border states), but waiting to announce it until the Union won a significant victory. Some people criticized Lincoln for not releasing the slaves in the one area where he could actually free them, the border states. But Lincoln still did not want to alienate people in the border states. Moreover, Lincoln could only legally interfere as a war measure in those states in rebellion, in the war zone. In that sense, the Emancipation Proclamation makes sense.

The key point in deciding on the Emancipation Proclamation came in July 1862, when the leaders of border states rejected gradual emancipation. Lincoln realized that persuasion and compromise weren't working. The next day, he told his advisors that "we must free the slaves." He concluded that slaves were a key part of the Southern war effort, so the North had to target slavery to win the war. He decided not to proclaim abolition of slavery right away (Option 3), lest it look like desperation. Instead, he waited for a Union victory. This victory occurred in September 1862, at the Battle of Antietam. At this point, President Lincoln issued his famous Emancipation Proclamation, which would go into force in January 1863. In the short run, the proclamation led to a decline in Unionism in the South (some Unionists in eastern Tennessee did switch to the Confederate cause) and to bitter opposition by Democrats. After the proclamation, the war became primarily a Republican war, since almost all Democrats opposed the war. The proclamation boosted morale in the North and increased problems for the South, as more slaves escaped. Thus, the Emancipation Proclamation helped the North win the war. Republicans made significant gains in the 1862 elections, showing that the public in the North supported Lincoln's decision for emancipation.



A poster celebrating the Emancipation Proclamation

There were many long-term effects of the Emancipation Proclamation: it has inspired African Americans ever since (yet even 100 years later they were not completely free); Lincoln became known as the Great Emancipator; it brought a great feeling of achievement to abolitionists, although they criticized Lincoln for failing to emancipate slaves through the whole country; and it brought about a social revolution whereby the government could take away property for moral reasons.

In 1865, with President Lincoln’s support, Congress passed (and the states ratified) the 13th Amendment, abolishing slavery in the entire United States (Decision 4, Option 4).

The proclamation also called for African Americans to serve in the Union armies. At first they received lower pay and worse equipment than white soldiers (Decision 5, Option 2). But after African American soldiers protested, that policy was changed. African Americans received better treatment, but not equal rights (Decision 5, Option 3). Many Northerners were afraid that African Americans with weapons would lead to savage warfare. Nevertheless, the decision to use African Americans in the army had very significant effects. By the end of the war, 180,000 African Americans had fought in the Union army—eight percent of the total number of soldiers. In addition, just as with



the emancipation of slaves, African American soldiers fighting for freedom helped bring about a social revolution, demonstrating the equality of all races in the republic. African Americans fought valiantly—21 received the Medal of Honor for bravery. A Rhode Island artilleryman wrote in September 1863, “The prejudice against Negro troops is fast wearing away...” Social equality did not come in many places for 100 years or more, but the controversy over rights started immediately.

Prisoners of war were affected as a consequence of recruiting African American troops. Up to May 1863, Northern and Southern armies engaged in prisoner exchanges. By exchanging, for example, 1000 captured Southern soldiers for 1000 Northern captives, both sides avoided having to set up large prison camps. In reaction to African



Andersonville prison, 1864

Americans fighting, the Confederate Congress announced that the South would enslave or execute captured African American soldiers and their officers. The North retaliated by ending prisoner exchanges. For the rest of the war, large numbers of soldiers were held in prison camps, where many died of disease. One such prison camp, Andersonville (Georgia), became notorious for its horrible conditions.

For Decision 6 (slaves), President Lincoln chose Option 1 (recruit ex-slaves into the military), followed later by Option 2 (ex-slaves would work at labor contracts). Since the border states were now secure, Lincoln decided it was safe to take stronger action to weaken the Southern war effort. The president was concerned that runaways would move further north and compete with white workers for jobs; he preferred that ex-slaves fight in the war. He also cleverly framed the decision as providing reinforcements for white soldiers, thereby increasing support.



Freedmen in Richmond, Virginia

President Lincoln did not want to confiscate rebel land to distribute to ex-slaves (Decision 6, Option 3). The government did confiscate property, but the idea of distributing large amounts of land to ex-slaves was too radical. Confiscation of land to be redistributed to ex-slaves would also increase Southern resistance. Rather, Lincoln wanted Northern officials to encourage plantation owners to sell land to ex-slaves. He also wanted freedmen placed on abandoned plantations, to earn a living. Near the end of the war, in 1865, Lincoln signed the

Freedmen's Bureau Act, which included 40 acres for each freedman's family first under a lease and then for purchase, not as a gift. Lincoln believed the government could help freedmen, but the freedmen had to make it mainly on their own.

The president chose not to expand civil rights for African Americans (Decision 6, Option 5). He knew that civil rights were under the control of states, not the national government. He chose not to push the issue also because some Northern states, such as New Jersey and Illinois, denied African Americans civil rights. By the end of the war, on the other hand, Lincoln supported giving the vote to some freedmen, which showed he was moving toward civil rights for African Americans.

Overall, President Lincoln took a step-by-step approach to African American policies. He did what he could for slaves and ex-slaves while keeping the main goal of winning the war as his prime focus. He advanced more quickly on helping African Americans when those actions also helped win the war. Nevertheless, there is clear evidence that in some of his actions, Lincoln went beyond winning the war to help African Americans. For example, he kept working for the passage of the 13th Amendment even after victory was

assured. He eventually made abolition of slavery a condition of peace, despite the fact that this delayed settlement of the war and brought him criticism in the North.