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A Nation Divided: Reactions to the Emancipation Proclamation



On January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring that enslaved people in the Confederate states were free. This decision was an important step in the fight against slavery, but not everyone in the United States agreed on whether it was the right choice. Different groups of people had very different opinions about the proclamation.

Union Soldiers and the Emancipation Proclamation

Many Union soldiers were fighting in the Civil War to keep the country together, not necessarily to end slavery. Some were happy about the Emancipation Proclamation because they believed slavery was wrong. Others thought it would help the Union win the war because freed African Americans could join the Union Army and fight against the Confederacy.

However, some white Union soldiers did not support freeing enslaved people. They worried that African Americans would take their jobs or that the war would become about ending slavery instead of saving the Union.

Abolitionists and Their Support

Abolitionists were people who had worked for many years to end slavery in the United States. Famous abolitionists like Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman strongly supported the Emancipation Proclamation. They saw it as a step toward true freedom and equality for African Americans.

Even though they were happy about Lincoln's decision, many abolitionists wished the proclamation went further. It only freed enslaved people in Confederate states, not in the border states that stayed loyal to the Union. Abolitionists wanted all enslaved people to be free, no matter where they lived.

Northern Democrats and Opposition

Not everyone in the North supported the Emancipation Proclamation. Some Northern Democrats, especially those who did not care much about slavery, were angry about Lincoln's decision. They believed that freeing enslaved people would prolong the war and make it harder to bring the Southern states back into the Union. Others feared that newly freed African Americans would move north and compete for jobs and resources.

Lincoln knew that issuing the Emancipation Proclamation was a risky move, but he believed it was necessary. The proclamation changed the war from a fight about keeping the United States together into a fight about freedom and equality. While not everyone agreed with Lincoln's decision, it helped pave the way for the 13th Amendment, which ended slavery in the United States for good.