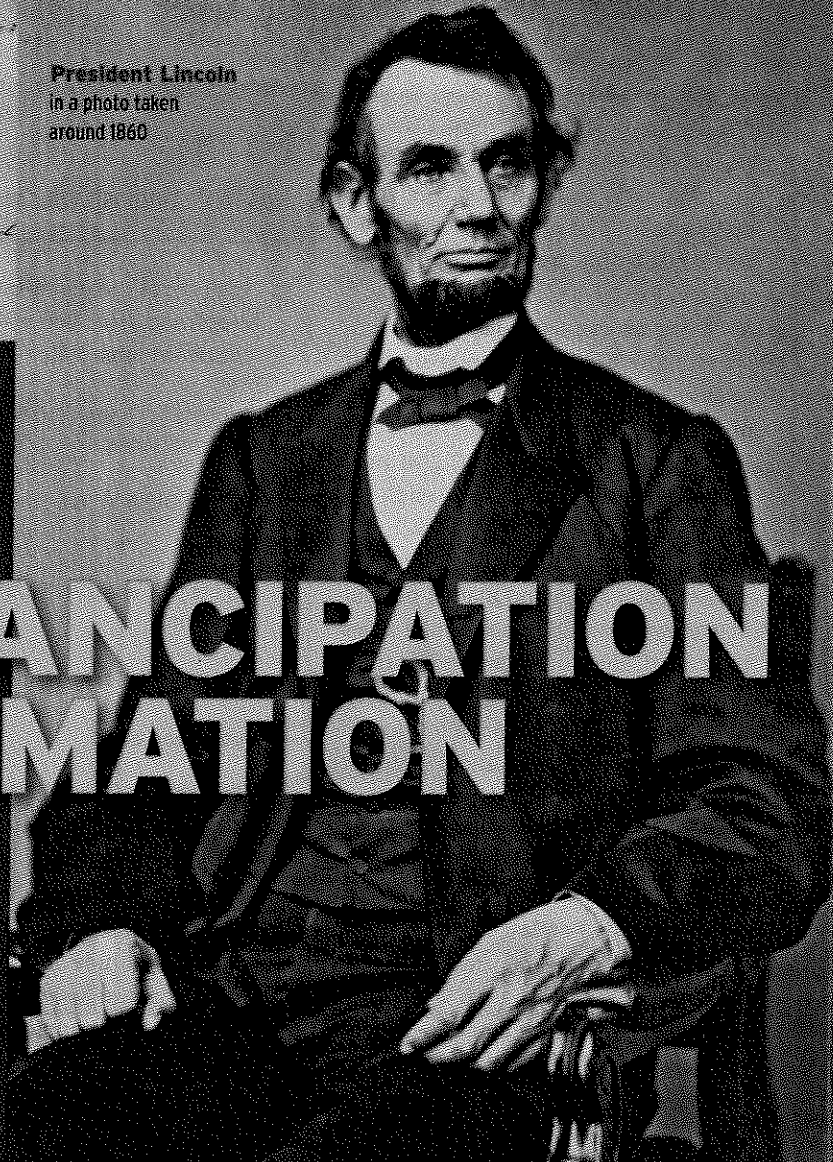


By the President of the United States of America

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

President Lincoln in a photo taken around 1860



TIMES PAST

1863

# THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION

Was Abraham Lincoln a reluctant emancipator or a political genius?

BY VERONICA MAJEROL

**A**braham Lincoln spent mid-day greeting visitors at the annual New Year's reception at the Executive Mansion in Washington, D.C.—what we now call the White House. By the time the festivities ended, the president was exhausted, but he had no time to rest. He wanted to take one last look at the final version of the proclamation he was about to sign.

His hands wobbly from all the hands he'd shaken, Lincoln put his unsteady signature on the Emancipation Proclamation and it was released to the world. It was Jan. 1, 1863, the Union was at war with the Confederacy, and the president had just declared that all slaves in the rebel states were "forever free."

Long recognized as the defining act of Lincoln's presidency,\* the Emancipation Proclamation didn't end slavery outright. But it transformed the nature of the Civil War, helped the Union secure victory, and was a crucial turning point in America's long struggle with race.

A lawyer from Kentucky who'd served four terms in the Illinois legislature and

one in the U.S. Congress, Lincoln had always hated slavery. But it wasn't until the 1850s that he committed himself publicly to an antislavery platform. It was during that decade that federal laws like the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and court rulings like the Dred Scott decision, escalated tensions over the issue of slavery.

### Secession & Civil War

Lincoln endorsed an antislavery stance that became the rallying cry of the new Republican Party. Its platform called for banning slavery in all federal territories and in Washington, D.C., withdrawing federal protection of slavery on the high seas, and relieving federal officials of their duty to return fugitive slaves to their masters under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.

Lincoln won the presidency in November 1860 without the support of any Southern states. Within a few weeks of his victory, South Carolina seceded from the Union. And by the time Lincoln was inaugurated on

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