

TIMELINE LEGAL MILESTONES FOR AFRICAN-AMERICANS



1863
Emancipation Proclamation

1865
The 13th Amendment

Abolishes slavery throughout the United States.

1868
The 14th Amendment

Establishes that blacks are U.S. citizens entitled to equal legal protections.

1870
The 15th Amendment

Grants black men the right to vote. (The 19th Amendment, ratified in 1920, gave all women the right to vote.)

1876-1965
Southern Backlash

"Jim Crow" laws in the South limit black civil liberties and voting rights. (Above, a theater in Leland, Mississippi, 1939)

I would do it," he wrote. "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 do that."

Freedom for Some

A month later, at the Battle of Antietam in Maryland on Sept. 17, 1862, Union troops turned back the first major Confederate invasion of the North. It was a bloody, costly victory for the Union, but it was the win Lincoln had been waiting for. He issued a "preliminary" Emancipation Proclamation, giving the rebel states until the end of the year to lay down their arms and rejoin the Union. If they refused, he would emancipate their slaves on the first day of the new year.

On Jan. 1, 1863, with the war still raging, Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, which declared all slaves in rebel states free. *The New York Times* called it an act that "marks an era in the history, not only of this war, but of this country and the world. . . . Whatever may be its immediate results, it changes entirely the relations of the National Government to the institution of Slavery."

Because it applied only to slaves in Confederate territories—which Lincoln did not control—the Emancipation Proclamation didn't immediately end slavery. Still, it accomplished several important things:

- First, it authorized the enlistment of free blacks for "armed service" in the Union Army. By the last year of the war, blacks

made up about 20 percent of the Union Army, tipping the balance of military power decisively in favor of the Union.

- The Proclamation also lifted the ban on enticement. Union soldiers were now authorized to go onto Southern farms and plantations and entice slaves away from their owners to work for the Union, not only depriving the South of slave labor but adding strength to the Union's efforts.

- It also put tremendous pressure on the slave-holding border states loyal to the Union. Lincoln always believed that the best way to abolish slavery was for the states to do it themselves, with the encouragement of the federal government. When Union authorities began recruiting black soldiers from loyal states that were technically exempted from emancipation, the institution of slavery was weakened in those states as well.

- Most importantly, perhaps, the Proclamation gave the war an added meaning: It was no longer just about preserving the Union; it was now also about ending slavery. The Union had been concerned throughout the war that France and Britain, which relied on the South for cotton, would come to the aid of the Confederacy. But those countries were morally opposed to slavery, and therefore were much less likely to side with the Confederacy after the Proclamation was issued.

By the end of the war, on May 9, 1865, more than half a million slaves had been emancipated, and six states—West