

Making Freedom
African Americans in U.S. History

SOURCEBOOK 4



Our New Day Begun
1861-1877



COMPILED AND EDITED BY
THE CURRICULUM SPECIALISTS AT
PRIMARY SOURCE, INC.

FOREWORD BY
JAMES OLIVER HORTON



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Contents

Foreword by James Oliver Horton, George Washington University xiii
Project Staff xv
Introduction xix

CONTEXT ESSAY “Who Freed the Slaves? The Civil War and Reconstruction” by
Dr. Patrick Rael, Bowdoin College 1

Part I ✂ Initial War Aims

To what degree was the war about freeing slaves? At the start of the war, what was Abraham Lincoln’s primary goal? How did his purposes evolve as the war progressed? What did African Americans think were the goals for the war?

LESSON 1 Lincoln and Slavery 12
LESSON 2 Enslaved People Force the Issue 22

Part II ✂ The Soldiers’ Experience

The war was not the quick suppression of Southern rebellion that the Union had anticipated. Battlefield stalemates and tremendous loss of lives forced the Union to consider what had once been unthinkable—arming black men. Many African Americans jumped at the chance to fight for their freedom. What prejudices did they face in government policies and in the day-to-day realities of serving in the army? What were the limits of the Union’s commitment to complete equality?

LESSON 3 Who Should Fight? 38
LESSON 4 The Decision to Enlist 56

Part III ✂ Wartime Reconstruction

Union successes often seemed to pose as many problems as they solved. As slavery withered in the wake of the Union army, what would replace it? What were the variety of solutions explored by black people, their allies, and their enemies during the war?

- LESSON 5 Sustaining a Living 71
 LESSON 6 How to Rebuild the Union 77

Part IV ✂ The Dawn of Freedom

The end of the Civil War in April of 1865 heralded a new world of freedom for African Americans. But, as the assassination of Abraham Lincoln just days after the Confederate surrender symbolized, conflict and tension were not over. The new president, Andrew Johnson, permitted many former Confederates to return to power. But Congress, in the hands of antislavery legislators, provided the Freedmen's Bureau to assist with the transition to freedom. Freedpeople's hopes for freedom developed in the midst of this conflict between Congress and the White House.

- LESSON 7 Hopes and Obstacles 85
 LESSON 8 The Black Codes and Presidential Reconstruction 101
 LESSON 9 The "Misrepresented Bureau" 113

Part V ✂ Labor

With freedom, one important thing did not change: African Americans were still expected to perform the bulk of the manual labor in the South. But with the institution of slavery gone, how would the reconstruction of southern agriculture proceed? Would formerly enslaved African Americans be given the opportunity to become prosperous independent farmers? Or would they be limited to the status of semiservility?

- LESSON 10 Occupations and Obstacles 129
 LESSON 11 The Rise of Sharecropping 144

Part VI ✂ Building a Free Community

Freedom provided African Americans new opportunities to build community institutions. The family, the schoolroom, and the church became the centers around which African American life coalesced. How did these institutions work to create a sense of community among the freedpeople? What obstacles did they help African Americans to overcome?

- LESSON 12 Reuniting and Protecting Family 154
 LESSON 13 Knowledge Is Power 164
 LESSON 14 The Role of the Church 181

Part VII ✂ Politics and the End of Reconstruction

Reconstruction was as much a political as a social revolution. By 1870, the constitution legally guaranteed the right to vote to all African American men. Starting with the Military Reconstruction Acts of 1867, the enfranchisement of black men transformed southern politics. Nonetheless, by 1877, Reconstruction's fragile experiment in biracial democracy had failed. Why were African American men given the right to vote? How, despite that African Americans were armed with the ballot, did Reconstruction fail to guarantee the freedpeople equality? Why did some African Americans choose to head West in search of work and community?

- LESSON 15 Voting and Representation 191
LESSON 16 The Undoing of Radical Reconstruction 208
LESSON 17 The Exodusters—Ho for Kansas! 221

Glossary 240

Credits 244



Hopes and Obstacles

The year 1865 was momentous. The Civil War ended and the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, abolishing slavery in the United States, was ratified, albeit under duress in the South. This freedom did not come to everyone at the same time or in the same form. As William Friedheim writes in *Freedom's Unfinished Revolution*:

Emancipation happened in different ways and came in different forms. Some slaves seized freedom by sabotaging plantation production, escaping to Union lines, and joining the Union Army to fight for the liberation of their people. For others, freedom had to wait for Lincoln's January 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, for liberating northern armies, or for the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery in January 1865 (p. 173).

By 1865, four million former slaves were free Americans. What did it mean to be free? How varied were black responses to emancipation in the single year 1865? No one or even twenty documents can ever fully capture the responses, for every person had his or her own story of becoming free. Moreover, these subtle, yet powerful, responses were difficult to capture in documents. Friedheim explains:

But once emancipation came, African Americans took the measure of freedom's boundaries, constantly pushing them outward. At freedom's first coming, they defied the physical and psychological barriers created by years of slavery. Discarding the symbols of their enslavement, many rejected names forced upon them by slave-masters and took new ones. Casting aside the drab garments of slavery, they wore new badges of freedom—brightly colored outerwear, fancy hats, ornate parasols, elegant veils.

They held meetings without white permission, supervision, or presence—that is, without the probing eyes of a master or overseer. In everyday encounters, they challenged former masters, mistresses, and overseers. Such defiance was expressed in a variety of encounters—looking an ex-master straight in the eye, talking back to a plantation mistress, refusing to tip a hat or give way to whites on a sidewalk (p. 173).

The documents in this lesson will help orient students to what freedom meant for many African Americans in 1865 given their previous servitude and the reality of the world in which they now lived. This orientation should serve as a springboard for the subsequent exploration of Reconstruction.

Organizing Idea

The goal of this lesson is to allow students to experience a snapshot of responses to emancipation in the single year 1865 in order to get a sense of what freedom meant, some of the hopes freed people had, and the obstacles they faced.

Student Objectives

Students will:

- ❖ create a working definition of “freedom”
- ❖ learn about freedpeople’s initial and varied responses to emancipation
- ❖ compare the reality of emancipation to an ideal: the gains that were made, the obstacles that existed, and the resources people could draw upon
- ❖ reflect upon the impact white intentions of emancipation had on the reality of emancipation
- ❖ practice the skill of making generalizations by synthesizing information from a range of documents

Key Questions

- ❖ What does it mean to be free?
- ❖ What expectations did African Americans have for being free?
- ❖ What did people gain with freedom?
- ❖ What obstacles or hardships did they face?
- ❖ How did the reality of freedom meet people’s expectations?

Primary Source Materials

DOCUMENT 4.7.1: Image of *Forever Free*, sculpture by Edmonia Lewis, 1867

DOCUMENT 4.7.2: Excerpt from interview with former slave Felix Haywood, age 92, of San Antonio, Texas, “Like Freedom Was a Place”

DOCUMENT 4.7.3: Excerpt from interview with former slave Fred James, age 81, of Newberry, South Carolina, “When Christmas Came”

DOCUMENT 4.7.4: Excerpt from interview with former slave Simon Phillips, age 90, of Birmingham, Alabama, “What’s Mine is Mine”

DOCUMENT 4.7.5: Excerpts from freedpeople’s reactions to emancipation from *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Dorothy Sterling

DOCUMENT 4.7.6: A freedman’s description of Norfolk, Virginia, 1865

DOCUMENT 4.7.7: Excerpts from an interview between African American ministers and lay leaders and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton and General William T. Sherman, Savannah, Georgia, January 12, 1865

DOCUMENT 4.7.8: Excerpts from a Protest Memorial sent to President Andrew Johnson, 1865

DOCUMENT 4.7.9: Advertisements seeking relatives in the *Colored Tennessean*, Nashville, 1865

DOCUMENT 4.7.10: Letter from the wife of a Michigan black soldier to the Secretary of War, May 11, 1865

DOCUMENT 4.7.11: “Emancipation,” a wood engraving by Thomas Nast, 1865

DOCUMENT 4.7.12: “Freedom to the Slaves,” a print by Currier & Ives

Supplementary Materials

ITEM 4.7.A: Station 1, Worksheet for Documents 4.7.2–4.7.6

ITEM 4.7.B: Station 2, Worksheet for Documents 4.7.7 and 4.7.8

ITEM 4.7.C: Station 3, Worksheet for Documents 4.7.9 and 4.7.10

ITEM 4.7.D: Station 4, Worksheet for Documents 4.7.11 and 4.7.12

Vocabulary

emancipation

jubilee

petition

serfdom

Student Activities

Engaging the Students—Building a Working Definition of Freedom

Activity 1

Students should begin by writing their own definitions of the concept of freedom. They can follow this up by working in small groups to create posters depicting their thoughts on freedom.

Students then look at an image of Edmonia Lewis’s sculpture *Forever Free* and research her biography and the subject of the statue. Students then answer the following:

- ❖ Define the “romantic ideal” of freedom that you think Lewis is expressing.
- ❖ Add to that definition ideas you consider part of “being free.”
- ❖ Share your answers.

Activity 2**Exploring Document Stations**

This activity is organized around the use of *stations*, with students moving in groups around the classroom to examine documents and other information displayed at four centers or stations. The order of the stations is not important; what is important is that each group completes each station. Typically, students need 15 minutes per station, but check for progress before having groups rotate from one station to the next. Students should complete the questions for each station on their handouts. Stations enable teachers to use walls, tables, and other spaces to display the materials effectively. In addition, the combination of time limits and a chance to move seem to increase student focus.

Handout: Stations Worksheet (Items 4.7.A–D) Explain to students that they will do a stations activity in which they will study documents from the year 1865, the year the Civil War ended and the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery was enacted. They will use these documents to compare the ideals expressed by Lewis and by themselves with the reality of freedom as expressed by the people experiencing it. Prepare students for the appearance of the word “nigger” in the documents in station 1. Explain whose voices are heard through the documents and why this word would be included in these documents. If appropriate, give students a chance to share their thoughts and feelings on having to read this word in school.

Note: The questions for each station are listed here and are on the CD-ROM in supplementary materials, Items 4.7.A–D.

STATION 1: VOICES OF EX-SLAVES

Students read the recollections of freed slaves on emancipation (4.7.2–4.7.6) and respond to the questions.

- ❖ What did freedpeople gain with emancipation?
- ❖ What obstacles or hardships did freedpeople face?
- ❖ List the range of emotions expressed within these documents and the events or situations that sparked these emotions.
- ❖ How would you characterize the language and tone of these documents? What do they reveal to you about the authors?

STATION 2: FORMAL RESPONSES TO FREEDOM

Students read two excerpts from formal presentations to the U.S. government from leaders in the black community (4.7.7 and 4.7.8) and answer the following:

- ❖ How did Garrison Frazier define slavery? And freedom?
- ❖ List the examples of black community action as described in the document from Richmond, Virginia.

- ❖ What were the ways that the black community in Richmond had supported the Union war effort? At what cost?
- ❖ What expectations did these black leaders have of the U.S. government after the abolition of slavery? What relationship did they see between what they did during the war and these expectations?
- ❖ Who were the people who made these statements? How would you characterize the language and tone of these documents? What do they reveal to you about the authors?

STATION 3: SEARCH FOR FAMILY

Students look at the newspaper advertisements (4.7.9) and the letter to President Johnson (4.7.10) and then answer these questions:

- ❖ What were people asking for in these documents? Why weren't their families together in the first place?
- ❖ Why do you think that people used these two methods (newspaper advertisements and a letter to President Johnson)?
- ❖ What do these documents tell you about the gains and the obstacles that freedom brought blacks?

STATION 4: IMAGES OF EMANCIPATION DRAWN BY WHITE ARTISTS

Students look at the two images of emancipation by white artists with abolitionist sympathies (4.7.11 and 4.7.12) and answer the following questions:

- ❖ In Nast's celebration of emancipation, what did "being free" mean? List what he believed freed people gained, including what they were freed from.
- ❖ In both images, what did Abraham Lincoln's presence represent? In the eyes of the artists, who was responsible for black freedom?
- ❖ Look closely at Nast's "Emancipation." Do you see other suggestions that freedpeople were still dependent on whites? (Notice the posture of the soldier receiving pay and the roles of whites and blacks in the cotton field scene.)
- ❖ Look at the depiction of black families in the images. How did these artists believe emancipation had helped black families?

Discussion

- ❖ Discuss the answers that students have for each station. Where there are differences, encourage students to refer to the actual documents for evidence to support their answers.
- ❖ Compare the language of the documents in stations 1 and 2. What statement can students make about freedpeople's educational level based on this comparison?

Activity 3

- ❖ Compare the images of families in the engravings of station 4 with the searches for family in station 3. What connections are there between the attitudes represented in these sympathetic renditions of emancipation and the obstacles facing freedpeople identified in stations 1–3? Think about who the audience was for the engravings.
- ❖ What information do we now have which builds our understanding of what being free meant for African Americans in 1865? (Consider the following ideas: emotional responses blacks had to emancipation, the expectations people had of being free, what the reality of freedom was, and the resources within the black community that could help freedpeople face that reality.)
- ❖ What is not captured in the documents? (For example, can we hear the jubilation in the songs sung? Can we know the numbers of miles walked and people questioned in search of family members torn apart by slavery? Can we tell how people carried themselves when free as compared to when enslaved?) What else would students like to know? How would they go about finding the information?
- ❖ Several of the documents credit Abraham Lincoln with bestowing freedom on the enslaved. Based on what students have learned in this and preceding lessons, is this accurate? How did this belief begin? How and why did it persist?

Activity 4 **Creative Extensions**

- ❖ Based on information in the documents, respond in writing to the following statement: 1865 was a year of celebration for black people, because it was the year that they officially gained their freedom. They were ready to face the future.
- ❖ Thinking about Edmonia Lewis’ and Thomas Nast’s representations of emancipation and what students have learned in the previous documents, how would students express what being free meant for blacks in 1865? They

Music Connection



No one can quite imagine how African Americans who had lived their lives in bondage felt when the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution was ratified, freeing all enslaved people in the United States. Music selections in Sourcebooks 3 and 4 give a mere hint. In “Ring, Ring the Big Bell” (available on the **CD-ROM**), freedmen and -women celebrated the end of

slavery. The plantation bell would no longer dictate when their workdays would begin and end. They also sang of filling their pockets with money from the plantation coffers—money earned from their labor. Students should listen to the song as well as others that speak to freedom (“Go Down Moses” and “Many Thousand Gone” in Sourcebook 3 and “Before I’d Be a Slave” in Sourcebook 4) to identify common themes.

may use artwork, drama, and/or voice (spoken or sung) to express themselves. Either way, they should explain what their representation means. (Use the descriptions accompanying both the Lewis and Nast pieces as models for describing the representations.)

Further Student and Teacher Resources

- Berlin, Ira, Barbara Fields, Steven Miller, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, eds. *Free at Last: A Documentary History of Slavery, Freedom, and the Civil War*. New York: The New Press, 1992.
- Berlin, Ira, Marc Favreau, and Steven F. Miller, eds. *Remembering Slavery: African Americans Talk about their Personal Experiences of Slavery and Freedom*. New York: The New Press, 1990.
- Botkin, B. A., ed. *Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery*. New York: Delta, 1994.
- Brink, Dean C. "What Did Freedom Mean? The Aftermath of Slavery as Seen by Former Slaves and Former Masters in Three Societies." *Magazine of History*, Vol IV, No. 1 (Winter 1989): pp. 35–46.
- Collier, Christopher, and James Lincoln. *Reconstruction and the Rise of Jim Crow, 1864–1896*. New York: Benchmark, 2000.
- Cruden, Robert. *The Negro in Reconstruction*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1969.
- Friedheim, William et al. eds. *Freedom's Unfinished Revolution: An Inquiry into the Civil War and Reconstruction* (American Social History Project). New York: The New Press, 1996.
- Schleichert, Elizabeth. *Thirteenth Amendment: Ending Slavery*. Springfield, NJ: Enslow, 1998.
- Smith, John David. *Black Voices from Reconstruction: 1865–1877*. Brookfield, CT: The Millbrook Press, 1996.
- Sterling, Dorothy, ed. *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1984.

Video

Unchained Memories, Readings from the Slave Narratives. New York: HBO Video, 2003.

Website

The Thirteenth Amendment. FindLaw, West Publishing Company
<http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/data/constitution/amendment13/>
A detailed look at the Thirteenth Amendment and related documentation and explanations

Contemporary Slave Narratives

Connection



First-person stories are necessarily subjective; those told through an interviewer bear the mark of that person's perspectives. Nevertheless, these stories provide rich sources of information. Used together with other sources, they help us create a deeper and more complete picture of the past. As first-person stories, slave narratives provide a singular way to understand the everyday experience of slavery and its aftermath.

In the 1930s, the Works Progress Administration (WPA), charged with administering public works in order to relieve national unemployment, and other smaller projects organized at both the federal and state levels collected more than 2,000

interviews with former slaves. Boxes of these materials were then shelved during World War II. With a few exceptions, the narratives went relatively untouched until the 1970s. At that time, the Library of Congress began work on the collection, work that will no doubt continue well into the twenty-first century.

Today, thanks to digital technology and the Internet, we all have access to more and more of this important history. See *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936–38* (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ambome.html>). Students can explore the site, select excerpts from the interviews, and compile their own collection of former slaves' recollections of emancipation and Reconstruction.



Primary Source Materials for Lesson 7

4.7.1

Image of *Forever Free*, sculpture by
Edmonia Lewis, 1867

Born in 1845, Edmonia Lewis is believed to be the first woman sculptor of African American and Native American ancestry. Forever Free, inspired by the Emancipation Proclamation, is her best known piece. The sculpture is made from marble.



Howard University
Gallery of Art

4.7.2

Excerpt from interview with former slave
Felix Haywood, age 92, of San Antonio, Texas,
“Like Freedom Was a Place”

The end of the war, it come just like that—like you snap your fingers. . . . How did we know it! Hallelujah broke out—

Abe Lincoln freed the nigger
With the gun and the trigger;
And I ain't going to get whipped any more,
I got my ticket,
Leaving the thicket,
And I'm a-heading for the Golden Shore!

Soldiers, all of a sudden, was everywhere—coming in bunches, crossing and walking and riding. Everyone was a-singing. We was all walking on golden clouds. Hallelujah!

Union forever,
Hurrah, boys, hurrah!
Although I may be poor,
I'll never be a slave—
Shouting the battle cry of freedom.

Everybody went wild. We all felt like heroes, and nobody had made us that way but ourselves. We was free. Just like that, we was free. . . .

The full text of Document 4.7.2 is available on the CD-ROM.

4.7.3

Excerpt from interview with former slave
Fred James, age 81, of Newberry, South Carolina,
“When Christmas Came”

I 'member when freedom come, Old Marse said, “You is all free, but you can work on and make this crop of corn and cotton; then I will divide up with you when Christmas comes.” They all worked, and when Christmas come, Marse told us we could get on and shuffle for ourselves, and he didn't give us anything. We had to steal corn out of the cob. We prized the ears out between the cracks and took them home and parched them. We would have to eat on these for several days.

4.7.4

Excerpt from interview with former slave
Simon Phillips, age 90, of Birmingham, Alabama,
“What’s Mine is Mine”

One day . . . a few niggers was sticking sticks in the ground when the massa come up.

“What you niggers doing!” he asked.

“We is staking off the land, Massa. The Yankees say half of it is ourn.”

The massa never got mad. He just look calm-like.

“Listen, niggers,” he says, “what’s mine is mine, and what’s yours is yours. You are just as free as I and the missus, but don’t go fooling around my land. I’ve tried to be a good master to you. I have never been unfair. Now if you wants to stay, you are welcome to work for me. I’ll pay you one-third the crops you raise. But if you wants to go, you sees the gate.”

The massa never have no more trouble. Them niggers just stays right there and works. Sometime they loaned the massa money when he was hard pushed. Most of ’em died on the old grounds.

4.7.5

Excerpts from freedpeople’s reactions to emancipation
from *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the
Nineteenth Century*, edited by Dorothy Sterling

We done heared dat Lincum gonna turn de niggers free Ole missus say dey warn’t nothin’ to it Den a Yankee soldier tole someone in Williamsburg dat Marse Lincum done signed de mancipation. Was winter time an’ moughty cold dat night, but ev’ybody commence gittin’ ready to leave. Didn’t care nothin’ ’bout Missus—was goin’ to Union lines. An’ all dat night de niggers danced an’ sang right out in de cold. Nex’ mornin’ at day-break we all started out wid blankets an’ clothes an’ pots an’ pans an’ chickens piled on our backs, ’cause Missus said we couldn’t take no horses or carts. . . .

The full text of Document 4.7.5 is available on the CD-ROM.

4.7.6A freedman's description of Norfolk,
Virginia, 1865

From the outset, whites thwarted efforts of freedpeople to create new lives.

In many of the more remote districts, individual planters are to be found who still refuse to recognize their negroes as free, forcibly retaining the wives and children of their late escaped slaves; cases have occurred not far from Richmond itself, in which an attempt to leave the plantation has been punished by shooting to death; and finally, there are a number of cases known to ourselves in the immediate vicinity in which a faithful performance, by colored men, of the duties of labor contracted for, has been met by a contemptuous and violent refusal of the stipulated compensation!

4.7.7Excerpts from an interview between
African American ministers and lay leaders
and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton and
General William T. Sherman, Savannah,
Georgia, January 12, 1865

Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton and General William T. Sherman invited twenty African American leaders to meet with them to discuss the future of thousands of slaves now free as a result of General Sherman's military advances. Garrison Frazier, a Baptist minister, had been born in Granville County, North Carolina and was a slave until 1857, when he bought his freedom. The African Americans present chose him as their spokesman. The interview was reported in a New York newspaper the following month.

Second [Question]—State what you understand by Slavery and the freedom that was to be given by the President's proclamation.

Answer—Slavery is, receiving by *irresistible power* the work of another man, and not by his *consent*. The freedom, as I understand it, promised by the proclamation, is taking us from under the yoke of bondage, and placing us where we could reap the fruit of our own labor, take care of ourselves and assist the Government in maintaining our freedom.

The full text of Document 4.7.7 is available on the CD-ROM.

4.7.8

Excerpts from a Protest Memorial sent to
President Andrew Johnson, 1865

On June 10, 1865, more than 3,000 African Americans gathered in the First Baptist Church of Richmond, Virginia, to listen as a "protest memorial" that had been sent to President Andrew Johnson on their behalf, was read aloud:

Mr. President,

None of our people are in the alms-house, and when we were slaves the aged and infirm who were turned away from the homes of hard masters, who had been enriched by their toil, our benevolent societies supported while they lived, and buried when they died, and comparatively few of us have found it necessary to ask for Government rations, which have been so bountifully bestowed upon the unrepentant Rebels of Richmond. . . . During the . . . Slaveholders' Rebellion we have been true and loyal to the United States Government; . . . We have given aid and comfort to the soldiers of freedom (for which several of our people, of both sexes, have been severely punished by stripes and imprisonment). We have been their pilots and their scouts, and have safely conducted them through many perilous adventures.

The full text of Document 4.7.8 is available on the CD-ROM.

4.7.9

Advertisements seeking relatives in the
Colored Tennessean, Nashville, 1865

Earlier in the nineteenth century, when huge plantations were created in the Deep South, slave owners broke up thousands of African American slave families to fill the need for labor. Once emancipated, freedpeople began to search for sons, daughters, husbands, wives, and parents. African American newspapers frequently carried advertisements such as the ones below.

Saml. Dove wishes to know of the whereabouts of his mother, Areno, his sisters Maria, Neziah, and Peggy, and his brother Edmond, who were owned by Geo. Dove, of Rockingham county, Shenandoah Valley, Va. Sold in Richmond, after which Saml. and Edmond were taken to Nashville, Tenn., by Joe Mick; Areno was left at the Eagle Tavern, Richmond. Respectfully yours, Saml. Dove, Utica, New York!

The full text of Document 4.7.9 is available on the CD-ROM.

4.7.10Letter from the wife of a Michigan black soldier
to the Secretary of War, May 11, 1865

Detroit May 11 1865

Dear sir I have taken the Liberty to write you a few lines which I am compelled to do I am colored it is true but I have feeling as well as white person and why is it the colored soldiers letters cant pass backward and forwards as well as the white ones Mr Stanton Dear sir I think it very hard We cant get any letters and I wish would please look in this matter and have things arranged so we can hear from our Husband if we cant see them I have not heard from my Husband in three months John Bailey is my husband he was Drum major of the 100th united States Colored Troops he went from Detroit he is the man Senator Howard wrote to you about last summer and tried to get afurlough for him Then he was sick I have hurd through others he was very sick and since that I have heard he was dead if he is living I wish you would please grant him afurlough to come home he was promised one when he went away and he has been gone over a year and I do wish you would be so kind as to let him come home if he is living I wish you would look oar your Books and see if he is alive I dont know who to write to only you President Lincoln is gone and he was our best friend and now we look to you and I hope God will wach over and protect you through this war

Please write me as soon as you get this Direct to Mrs. Lucy Bailey 190 Congress Street 190

4.7.11

“Emancipation,” a wood engraving
by Thomas Nast, 1865

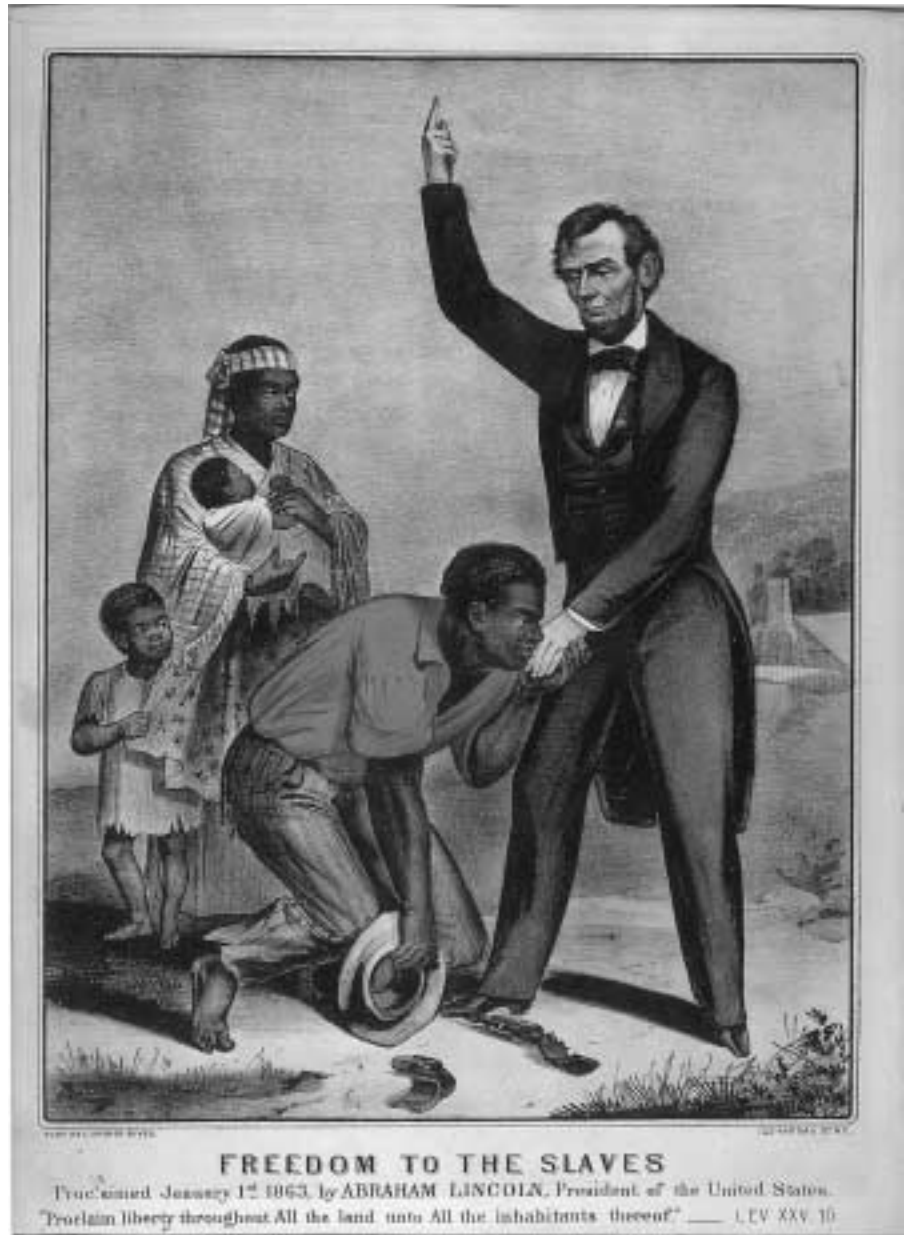
Drawn by Thomas Nast (1840–1902), the image was published in Harper’s Weekly, January 24, 1863.



Library of Congress

4.7.12

“Freedom to the Slaves,” a print by Currier & Ives



Rare Books and Special Collections Division,
McGill University Libraries, Montreal, Canada