

The End of the War

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

Following the turning points at Vicksburg and Gettysburg, nearly two more bloody years passed before the Civil War ended. Nevertheless, by the summer of 1863, the Union had effectively mobilized its government, citizens, and resources for the ongoing struggle.

The motivations behind the Union war effort changed in 1863, with the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation. Now the Union could be restored only if military victory was accompanied by the end of slavery.

This tutorial examines the end of the Civil War in three parts:

1. The Emancipation Proclamation

When the Civil War began, President Lincoln approached the issue of slavery cautiously, for two reasons:

- He disapproved of slavery personally and opposed the expansion of the institution into western territories, but did not believe he had the authority to abolish slavery where it already existed.
- He feared that making the abolition of slavery a stated objective of the war would cause slaveholding border states such as Maryland or Missouri to join the Confederacy.

Lincoln's only objective during the war's first years was to restore the Union. Much to the frustration of abolitionists, he took a middle-of-the-road stance on slavery. This stance is evident in a letter from Lincoln to newspaper editor Horace Greeley on August 22, 1862. A selection from this letter is provided below:

Abraham Lincoln, Letter to Horace Greeley

"I would save the Union. I would save it the shortest way under the Constitution....If there be those who would not save the Union unless they could at the same time save Slavery, I do not agree with them. If there be those who would not save the Union unless they could at the same time destroy Slavery, I do not agree with them. My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or destroy Slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it, 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 also do that. What I do about Slavery and the colored race, I do

because I believe it helps to save this Union, and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union. I shall do less whenever I shall believe what I am doing hurts the cause, and I shall do more whenever I shall believe doing more will help the cause. I shall try to correct errors when shown to be errors; and I shall adopt new views so fast as they shall appear to be true views....”



THINK ABOUT IT

1. As of August 1862, what was Lincoln prepared to do for enslaved people, and under what conditions?
2. Based on the evidence provided, how would you characterize Lincoln’s public position on slavery in August of 1862? Which parts of Lincoln’s statements led you to your conclusion?

It was the actions of enslaved people themselves that forced Lincoln’s hand on the issue of emancipation.

When the Civil War began, thousands of enslaved people—men, women, and children—fled to the safety of Union lines. In May 1861, Union General Benjamin Butler and other military officers labeled these refugees as **contrabands**.



TERM TO KNOW

Contrabands

Enslaved people who escaped to the Union army’s lines.

Butler and other officers argued that the Union army was not obliged to return runaways to their owners because the South had seceded from the Union, which meant that contrabands were no longer subject to fugitive slave laws. The Union army set up camps to house contraband and, in some cases, established schools to educate children. Their intent was not only to assist runaway enslaved people but to also deprive the Confederacy of valuable labor.

Congress, which was dominated by the Republican Party because many southern congressmen (mostly Democrats) left to join the Confederacy, began to define the status of runaway enslaved people and to address the issue of slavery in the U.S., by the fall of 1861.

- In August 1861, legislators approved the Confiscation Act of 1861, empowering the Union to seize property, including enslaved people, used by the Confederacy.
- In April 1862, Congress abolished slavery in Washington, D.C.
- In July 1862, Congress passed a second Confiscation Act, which extended freedom to runaway enslaved people as well as to those who lived in Union-occupied territory.

With the war having dragged on into the fall of 1862, and with abolitionists and Republicans in Congress demanding an end to slavery, Lincoln presented an ultimatum to the Confederacy on September 22, 1862, shortly after the Battle of Antietam. The ultimatum gave the Confederate states until January 1, 1863, to rejoin the Union. If they did, slavery would continue in the South. If they did not, Lincoln would abolish it.



THINK ABOUT IT

Why do you think Lincoln sent this ultimatum to the Confederate states before he issued the Emancipation Proclamation? What do you think would have happened if a Confederate state accepted his offer?

Confederate states took no action in response to Lincoln’s ultimatum. On January 1, 1863, he signed the

Emancipation Proclamation, which stated the following:

Emancipation Proclamation

“That on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free.”



TERM TO KNOW

Emancipation Proclamation

Signed by Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863; declared enslaved people who lived in areas of the Confederacy that were still in rebellion “thenceforward, and forever free”.

The proclamation did not immediately free the enslaved people who lived in the Confederacy. Although it was in rebellion against the United States, the lack of the Union army’s presence throughout much of the Confederacy meant that Lincoln’s proclamation could not be enforced there. Nor did the proclamation free enslaved people who lived in the border states that remained in the Union: those states were not in rebellion.

Lincoln relied on his executive power—his authority as commander-in-chief of the armed forces—to ensure the proclamation’s eventual enforcement. By applying it only to territories that remained under the control of the Confederacy, slaveholders, and state governments within the southern nation could not challenge the proclamation in federal court.

Although the liberation of nearly three million African American people would have to await Union victories in the Confederacy, the Emancipation Proclamation dramatically shifted the goal of Union war efforts. Restoration of the Union and the abolition of slavery became intertwined.

2. The End of the War

Following the victories at Vicksburg and Gettysburg in July of 1863, the Union brought the war into the Deep South. In doing so, it increasingly engaged in **total war**.



TERM TO KNOW

Total War

A state of war in which the government makes no distinction between military and civilian targets, and mobilizes all resources, extending its reach into all areas of citizens’ lives.

General Ulysses S. Grant, who designed and executed the successful Vicksburg campaign, took command of all Union military operations. In 1864, he focused his attention on destroying the Confederate forces commanded by Robert E. Lee in Virginia. During his Virginia campaign in the spring and summer of 1864, Grant pushed the Army of the Potomac forward relentlessly, exploiting his army’s numerical advantage, despite huge losses.

➞ **EXAMPLE** When Grant’s campaign began, the Army of the Potomac numbered approximately 115,000 men. After six weeks of fighting, the army experienced approximately 60,000 casualties.

Despite able defensive efforts by Robert E. Lee, Grant was able to exploit his numerical advantage. During June of 1864, Grant besieged Lee’s army at Petersburg, Virginia, an important rail hub located less than thirty

miles from the Confederate capitol of Richmond. Both armies dug in, creating miles of trenches and gun emplacements for a siege that would ultimately last nine months.

While Grant focused his attention on Lee, Union forces under the command of General **William Tecumseh Sherman** launched an invasion of the Deep South from Tennessee. Although confronted at every turn by Confederate forces, Sherman captured Atlanta, Georgia, on September 2, 1864.



PEOPLE TO KNOW

William Tecumseh Sherman

Union general whose invasion of the Deep South in 1864 cut a swath of destruction from Tennessee to Georgia and South Carolina.

Sherman's army then cut a swath of destruction across Georgia to the coastal city of Savannah. This **March to the Sea** inflicted the harsh realities of total war on the Confederacy.



TERM TO KNOW

March to the Sea

The Union army's military campaign in Georgia in 1864, led by General William Tecumseh Sherman. Sherman's army destroyed everything in its path, and demoralized southerners in the process. His soldiers burned houses and barns, confiscated food and livestock, and laid waste to anything that might assist the Confederacy.

Savannah fell to Sherman's forces on December 21, 1864. In January of 1865, his army invaded South Carolina—the first state to secede from the Union—and captured the major cities of Charleston and Columbia. He then prepared to move northward to join Grant and destroy Lee's army.

By the spring of 1865, it was clear to both sides that the Confederacy could not last much longer. Most of its major cities, ports, and industrial centers—Atlanta, Savannah, Charleston, Columbia, Mobile, New Orleans, and Memphis—had been captured by Union forces.

On April 2, Grant's army broke through Lee's lines at Petersburg, forcing the Confederate army to withdraw and leave Richmond defenseless. Union forces marched into the capital of the Confederacy the next day. Grant, meanwhile, pursued Lee's remaining forces (which numbered fewer than 35,000, compared to Grant's 100,000). On April 9th, Lee surrendered to Grant in the small village of Appomattox Court House, approximately ninety miles west of Richmond.



The house of Wilmer McLean, Appomattox Court House, Virginia, where Robert E. Lee surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant on April 9, 1865

The only significant Confederate fighting force that remained, commanded by Joseph E. Johnston, surrendered to General Sherman's army in North Carolina on April 26, 1865.

Current estimates place the death toll of the Civil War at around 750,000 men (Union and Confederate). Countless others were wounded.



DID YOU KNOW

Ten percent of all northern males 20-45 years old, and 30 percent of all Southern White males aged 18-40 years, were killed during the Civil War.

In addition to the high death toll, the Civil War destroyed millions of dollars worth of property. Many towns and cities in the South were laid to waste.

3. Lincoln's Plans for Reconstruction

With the Civil War finally over, President Lincoln began to implement his plans for **Reconstruction**.



TERM TO KNOW

Reconstruction

The period following the Civil War in which the Southern states were reintegrated into the Union. In early December of 1863, Lincoln unveiled the **ten percent plan**, which outlined the process by which Confederate states could return to the Union. It included the following:

1. A general pardon to all southerners except high-ranking Confederate government and military leaders.
2. A requirement that ten percent of the 1860 voters in the former Confederate states (i.e., white southerners) take a binding oath of allegiance to the United States.
3. Once ten percent of voters declared their allegiance, they could elect a state government to draft a new state constitution—one that abolished slavery.



TERM TO KNOW

Ten Percent Plan

Lincoln's Reconstruction plan, which required only 10 percent of the 1860 voters in the Confederate states to take an oath of allegiance to the United States.

Lincoln's plan was lenient. 90 percent of the state's 1860 voting population did not have to swear allegiance to the Union, or accept emancipation. Furthermore, it provided no way for former enslaved people to participate in government. Lincoln hoped that his plan would lead to the relatively quick reincorporation of southern states into the Union.

Lincoln's plan drew criticism from some Republicans, mostly northerners, who did not want to treat the South so moderately, and who wanted additional protection for emancipated people. This faction, known as **Radical Republicans**, wanted to impose harsh terms on the Confederacy for starting the Civil War. They also wanted to ensure that the federal government included plans to protect former enslaved people.



TERM TO KNOW

Radical Republicans

Northern Republicans who proposed harsher punishments for Confederate states and sought to protect the rights of former enslaved people.

In February 1864, two Radical Republicans, Ohio Senator Benjamin Wade, and Maryland Representative Henry Winter Davis responded to Lincoln's plan by introducing the **Wade-Davis Bill**.



TERM TO KNOW

Wade-Davis Bill

Opposed Lincoln's ten percent plan by requiring a majority of voters in a Confederate state to swear loyalty to the Union.

In addition to requiring a majority of voters in a southern state to swear loyalty to the Union, the Wade-Davis Bill guaranteed African Americans equality before the law (but not the right to vote).



DID YOU KNOW

The oath stipulated by the Wade-Davis Bill was known as the "Ironclad Oath". It required individuals to swear that they had never supported the Confederacy or made war against the United States.

Congress passed the Wade-Davis bill, but Lincoln refused to sign it. (This is known as a "pocket veto", a term that indicates that no action was taken while Congress was adjourned.) Lincoln believed that no one in the

South would meet the criteria outlined in the Wade-Davis Bill, which would delay Reconstruction. That Congress had supported the bill, however, showed that the Republican Party was divided regarding Reconstruction.

Realizing that the Emancipation Proclamation left the legal status of former enslaved people unresolved, Congress passed a constitutional amendment abolishing slavery in January 1865. The amendment swiftly gained the support necessary from the states and, in December of 1865 the **Thirteenth Amendment** was ratified.



TERM TO KNOW

Thirteenth Amendment

Abolished slavery in the United States.

Unfortunately, President Lincoln never saw the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment. On April 14, 1865, Confederate sympathizer and well-known actor **John Wilkes Booth** shot Lincoln while he attended a play, *Our American Cousin*, at Ford's Theater in Washington, D.C.



In *The Assassination of President Lincoln (1865)*, by Currier and Ives, John Wilkes Booth shoots Lincoln in the back of the head as he sits in the theater box with his wife, Mary Todd Lincoln, and their guests, Major Henry R. Rathbone and Clara Harris.



PEOPLE TO KNOW

John Wilkes Booth

American actor and southern sympathizer who assassinated President Lincoln on April 14, 1865. Lincoln died the next day. The responsibilities of Reconstruction passed to his Vice President (the new President), **Andrew Johnson**.



PEOPLE TO KNOW

Andrew Johnson

Democrat from Tennessee and Lincoln's vice president after the election of 1864; Johnson became president after Lincoln's death and oversaw the first years of Reconstruction, during which time he battled with Republicans in Congress.



SUMMARY

Following the victories at Vicksburg and Gettysburg, the Union implemented a strategy of total war against the Confederacy. This resulted in the occupation and destruction of key Confederate cities—and the deaths of thousands of Union and Confederate soldiers—before the Confederacy surrendered in 1865. While the war continued, Lincoln looked ahead to Reconstruction. His Emancipation Proclamation, along with the Thirteenth Amendment, transformed the Civil War from one fought to restore the Union, into a fight to end slavery. Early political battles over policy indicated that important divisions would be involved in Reconstruction.

Source: This tutorial curated and/or authored by Matthew Pearce, Ph.D with content adapted from Openstax "U.S. History". access for free at openstax.org/details/books/us-history LICENSE: **CREATIVE COMMONS ATTRIBUTION 4.0 INTERNATIONAL**



ATTRIBUTIONS

- [Image of McLean House \(1865\)](#) | License: Public Domain



TERMS TO KNOW

Contrabands

Enslaved people who escaped to the Union army's lines.

Emancipation Proclamation

Signed by Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863; declared enslaved people who lived in areas of the Confederacy that were still in rebellion "thenceforward, and forever free."

March to the Sea

The scorched-earth campaign employed in Georgia by Union General William Tecumseh Sherman in 1864.

Radical Republicans

Northern Republicans who proposed harsher punishments for Confederate states and sought to protect the rights of the formerly enslaved.

Reconstruction

The period following the Civil War in which the rebel southern states were integrated back into the Union.

Ten Percent Plan

Lincoln's Reconstruction plan, which required only 10 percent of the 1860 voters in Confederate states to take an oath of allegiance to the Union.

Thirteenth Amendment

Abolished slavery in the United States.

Total War

A state of war in which the government makes no distinction between military and civilian targets, and mobilizes all resources, extending its reach into all areas of citizens' lives.

Wade-Davis Bill

Opposed Lincoln's Ten Percent Plan by requiring a majority of voters in a Confederate state to swear loyalty to the Union.



PEOPLE TO KNOW

Andrew Johnson

Democrat from Tennessee and Lincoln's vice president after the election of 1864; Johnson became president after Lincoln's death and oversaw the first years of Reconstruction, during which time he battled with Republicans in Congress.

John Wilkes Booth

American actor and southern sympathizer who assassinated President Lincoln on April 14, 1865.

William Tecumseh Sherman

Union general whose invasion of the Deep South in 1864 cut a swath of destruction from Tennessee to Georgia and South Carolina.



DATES TO KNOW

1861

Union officers declare enslaved people who escaped to the Union army's lines "contraband of war"; The Confiscation Act of 1861 empowers the Union to seize property, including enslaved people, used by the Confederacy.

1862

Slavery is abolished in Washington, D.C.; The Second Confiscation Act extends freedom to those who escaped from slavery as well as to those who lived in Union-occupied territory; Abraham Lincoln presents an ultimatum to the Confederacy to rejoin the Union.

1863

The Emancipation Proclamation declares enslaved people who live in areas of the Confederacy that are still in rebellion "thenceforward, and forever free"; The Union achieves key victories at Vicksburg and

Gettysburg; Abraham Lincoln unveils his "ten percent plan".

1864

The Wade-Davis bill introduced; Ulysses S. Grant's Virginia campaign drove the Union to destroy Confederate forces; General William Tecumseh captures Atlanta then heads to Savannah in what is known as Sherman's March to the Sea.

1865

William Tecumseh Sherman captures Charleston; Ulysses S. Grant enters Richmond; The Confederate Army surrenders at Appomattox Courthouse; Abraham Lincoln is assassinated; The Thirteenth Amendment is ratified; The Reconstruction begins.