

“Forever Free”

President Abraham Lincoln may have wanted to free the slaves, but he *had* to win the war. He struggled to find a solution. It was the Emancipation Proclamation.

CHARACTERS

Abraham Lincoln, President of the U.S.

Simon Cameron, Lincoln's first Secretary of War

Salmon P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury

William H. Seward, Secretary of State

Wendell Phillips, a white abolitionist

Frederick Douglass, a black abolitionist

Charles Sumner, a U.S. Senator from Massachusetts

John J. Crittenden, a U.S. Congressman from Kentucky

John W. Crisfield, a U.S. Congressman from Maryland

Edwin M. Stanton, Lincoln's second Secretary of War

Montgomery Blair, Postmaster General

***Friends 1 & 2**, of Frederick Douglass

Narrators A-E

*Indicates a fictional or composite character. All others were actual people.

WORDS TO KNOW

- **abolitionist** (*n*): a passionate opponent of slavery
- **Confederacy** (*n*): the 11 Southern states that broke away from the Union and formed the Confederate States of America
- **emancipation** (*n*): the state of being set free from slavery
- **secede** (*v*): to formally withdraw from a country or group

PROLOGUE

Narrator A: What should the United States do about slavery? By the middle of the 19th century, that was the nation's most bitterly unresolved question. The rural South relied on black slaves to farm its tobacco and cotton—to sustain its very way of life. Other Americans sought to keep slavery from spreading to new states or to outlaw it altogether.

Narrator B: The quarrel reached the breaking point when Abraham Lincoln, candidate of the antislavery Republican Party, was elected president in November 1860. Beginning with South Carolina in December, 11 Southern states **seceded** from the U.S. federal government—called the Union—and declared themselves an independent country. The question then was: Would that split lead to civil war?

Narrator C: Taking office in March 1861, Lincoln sought to avert war by appealing to the **Confederacy**. “I have no purpose . . . to interfere with the institution of slavery in the states where it exists,” he said in his inaugural address. But when war came, Lincoln found that he *would* have to interfere. He did it with a historic document called the **Emancipation** Proclamation.

SCENE 1

Narrator D: On April 12, 1861, Confederate forces attack Union forces at Fort Sumter, South Carolina, igniting the Civil War. In July, President Lincoln meets with his Cabinet at the White House.

Abraham Lincoln: Mr. Cameron, what's the latest from Fort Monroe in Virginia?

Simon Cameron: Mr. President, about 850 escaped slaves have sought protection at the fort.

Salmon P. Chase: In fact, thousands of escaped slaves have fled to our lines, looking for freedom.

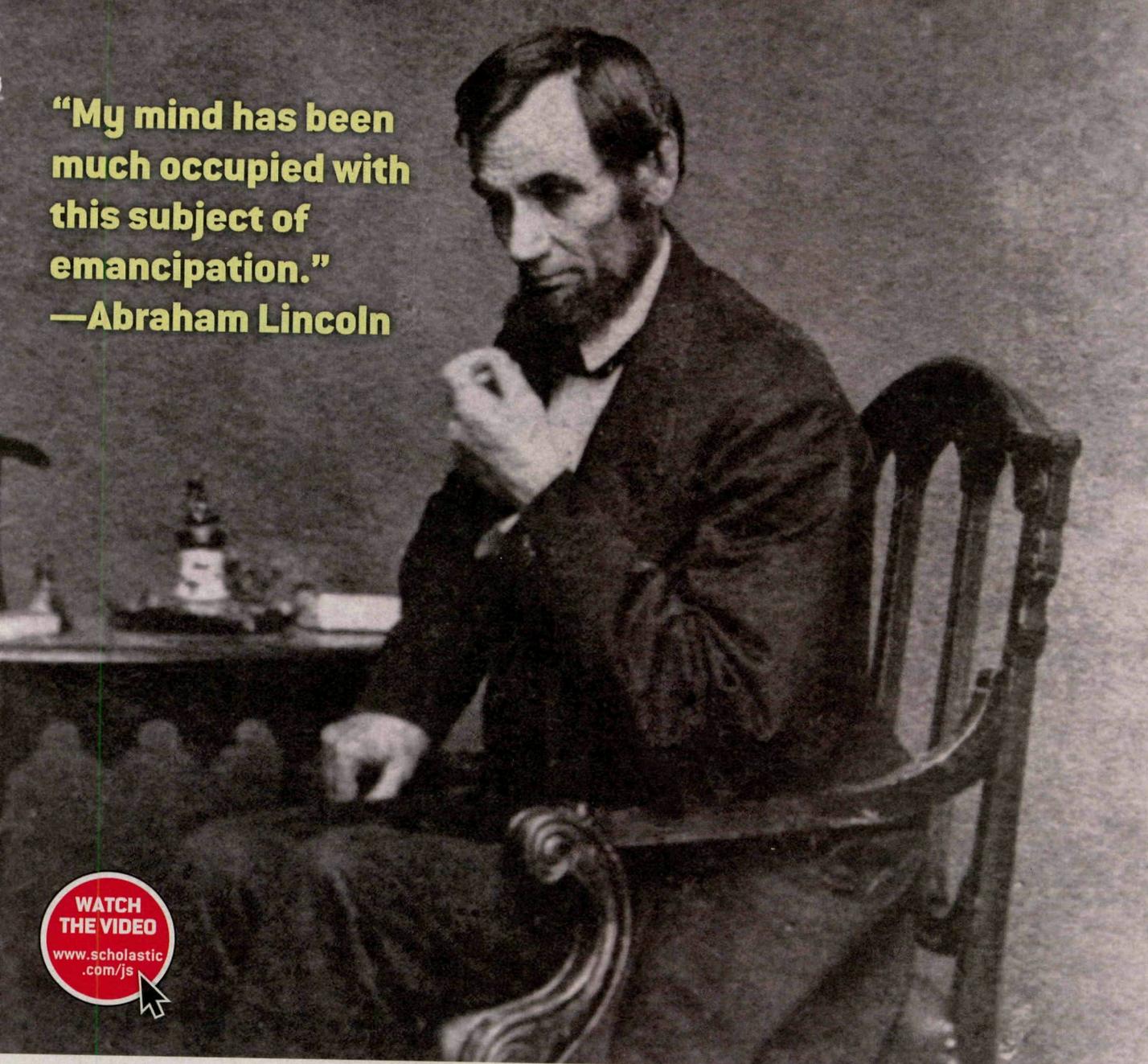
William H. Seward: Congress argues daily over whether or not this war is being fought to end slavery.

Lincoln: I believe that if slavery is not wrong, nothing is. But my primary concern is keeping the Union together. If I insist on freeing slaves, the border states could leave the Union and join the Confederacy.

Narrator E: The border states are Missouri, Kentucky, Maryland, and Delaware [see map, p. 16]. Although slavery is legal there, these states have remained in the Union—so far.

Lincoln: We need every advantage in fighting this terrible war. I hope to have God on my side, but I *must* have Kentucky.

“My mind has been much occupied with this subject of emancipation.”
—Abraham Lincoln



SCENE 2

Narrator A: The first year of the war goes badly for the Union Army. The Confederate forces of General Robert E. Lee make bold advances into Maryland. President Lincoln is assailed by critics from all sides. In January 1862, a leading **abolitionist** speaks before an overflow crowd in New York City . . .

Wendell Phillips: This war must destroy slavery and create a new nation that knows neither black nor white. Mr. Lincoln will not take the

lead to end this great scourge.

Narrator B: Phillips meets with fellow abolitionist Frederick Douglass.

Frederick Douglass: There are thousands of free blacks who are ready to fight for the Union. But Lincoln won't lift the ban on blacks in the Union Army.

Phillips: He also seems to think that the South will just lay down its arms if he promises not to take their slaves away.

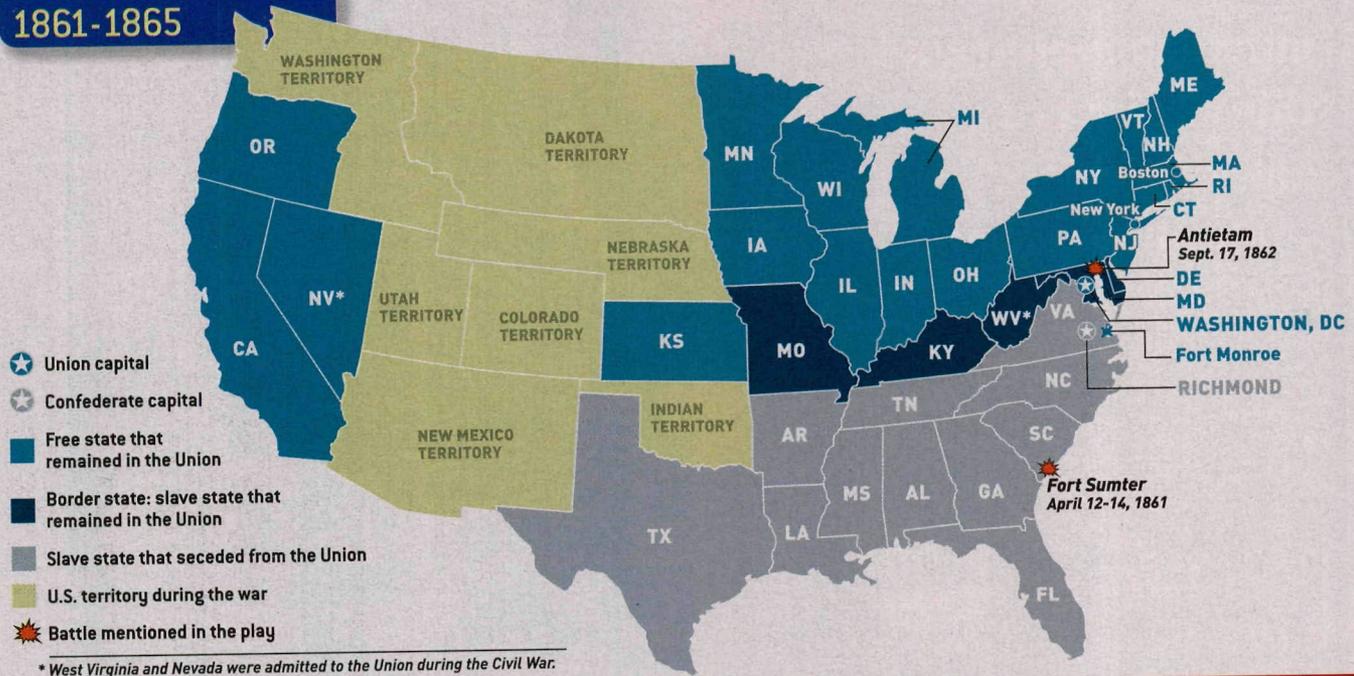
Narrator C: The pressure on Lincoln to change course intensifies. In the

early months of 1862, he repeatedly appeals to the border states to accept a new plan: Slave owners would be paid if the states agreed to gradually free their slaves.

Lincoln (*writing to the border states*): Nothing will break the back of the rebellion faster than if the rebels see you will never join them. The end of slavery is inevitable. You cannot be blind to the signs of the times.

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A NATION DIVIDED 1861-1865



Narrator D: But the border states refuse, as one Congressman says, “to accept the liberation of a single slave.”

SCENE 3

Narrator E: By the summer of 1862, Union General George McClellan’s failure to defeat the Confederate Army has become worrisome. In Washington, one observer calls the Fourth of July holiday “the gloomiest since the birth of this republic.” Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner, a prominent abolitionist, calls on Lincoln at the White House.

Charles Sumner: Mr. President, I urge you to commemorate this Independence Day by proclaiming that all slaves are free.

Lincoln: Sir, I would do so if I weren’t afraid that half the army would lay down their arms and other states would join the rebellion.

Sumner: On the contrary, such an action could inspire your army and rally the country behind you.

Lincoln: What would inspire us

right now would be some solid victories on the battlefield.

Narrator A: On July 12, Lincoln meets with a group of border state Congressmen and again pleads his case for gradual emancipation.

Lincoln: If you had agreed to my plan this spring, the war would be almost won by now. I beg you to act, and quickly.

Narrator B: But when the Congressmen get together later . . .

John J. Crittenden: What an insult. So the President thinks that we, the loyal states, should be punished while the rebels keep their slaves?

John W. Crisfield: Let him stick to his constitutional authority and fight this war for the proper reason.

SCENE 4

Narrator C: For Lincoln, this rejection by the border states is the last straw. It leads him to make a momentous decision. In late July, he calls his Cabinet together, takes two pieces of paper from his pocket, and begins to read.

Lincoln: I hereby proclaim that on the first day of January 1863, all persons held as slaves within any state or part of a state where the people are in rebellion against the United States shall then, thenceforward, and forever, be free.

Narrator D: When he finishes reading, there is stunned silence.

Because the decree would free all the South’s slaves at once—not gradually—it is bolder than anything Lincoln has proposed before.

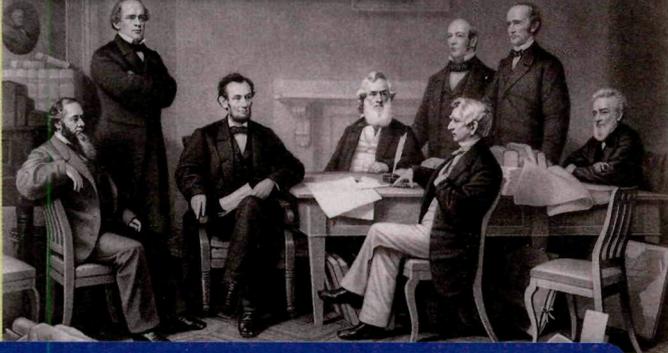
Finally, the Secretary of War speaks. **Edwin M. Stanton:** Mr. President, you must issue this decree at once. It strikes at one of the South’s most valuable resources and will sap the strength of the rebellion.

Montgomery Blair: Yet I worry that it will cost the Republicans votes in the fall elections.

Lincoln: Mr. Seward, you’ve been quiet. What do you think?

Seward: You should know that I approve of the proclamation, but I’m worried about its timing. Our recent losses have been so bad, the public

In this painting, Lincoln presents the Emancipation Proclamation to his Cabinet.



Thousands of free blacks and slaves joined the Union Army.



EMANCIPATION BY THE NUMBERS

31.4
million

U.S. population
(1860 Census)

800,000
slaves in border
states and other
areas where the
proclamation
didn't apply

3.9
million
total slaves in
the U.S.

50,000
slaves in parts
of the South
occupied by
Union troops,
freed by the
proclamation

3.1
million
slaves in the
South, to whom
the proclamation
applied

400,000
slaves who
escaped from
the South to
Union lines,
1861-1864

may see this as a desperate measure. Let's wait until the eagle of victory takes flight—and we can hang your proclamation around its neck.

Lincoln: Wise counsel, Mr. Seward. Very well. We must keep this matter to ourselves for now.

SCENE 5

Narrator E: For months, word from the battlefield remains grim. Then, on September 17, General McClellan turns back the Confederate invasion of Maryland at the bloody battle of Antietam Creek. A few days later, Lincoln again assembles his Cabinet.

Lincoln: My mind has been much occupied with this subject of emancipation. With Lee's army driven out of Maryland, I think the time has come.

Narrator A: The Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation is published, stirring celebrations throughout Northern cities. In Boston, Frederick Douglass gathers with friends.

Douglass: I can hardly believe I have lived to see this righteous decree.

Friend 1: But the proclamation frees only the slaves in the rebellious states. Because we can't enforce it, it's meaningless.

Friend 2: I disagree. Already the decree is inspiring slaves to escape in greater numbers. Many of them are volunteering to fight.

Douglass: The proclamation also has a powerful symbolic effect. Finally, the war has a moral cause—to end slavery. It is the first chapter in a new national history.

Narrator B: Months pass. On New Year's Day, Lincoln spends hours greeting well-wishers at the White House. In late afternoon, he sits down and prepares to sign the final Emancipation Proclamation.

Lincoln: I have never, in my life, felt more certain that I was doing right than I do in signing this paper. If my name ever goes into history, it will be for this act, and my whole soul is in it.

EPILOGUE

Narrator C: The Civil War would last another two and a half years, finally ending in June 1865. When the Emancipation Proclamation first took effect, it couldn't be enforced in most of the South. It also didn't apply to the border states. (See "Emancipation by the Numbers," above.) But the proclamation still had an enormous impact. By giving Southern slaves hope of freedom, it helped undercut the South's labor force. It also inspired thousands of border state slaves to join the Union Army, especially when Lincoln promised them immediate freedom for enlisting.

Narrator D: Most important, the Emancipation Proclamation laid the foundation for the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, which abolished slavery for good in December 1865. As a friend of Charles Sumner's wrote to him: "In such a Proclamation words become things, and powerful things too."

—Bryan Brown