

Freedom: A History of US

Section Texts and Labels

Introduction

Freedom: a natural right or a civil right?

Freedom: the right to resist oppression and to live free of bondage?

Freedom: the right to participate in the political life of a nation and to elect officials?

Freedom: the opportunity to earn a living and to enjoy the fruits of one's labor?

In the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson based the colonists' right to separate on the King's denial of their freedom – their inalienable rights to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Yet for more than 225 years the principle of freedom and our understanding of its implications have evolved dramatically.

Freedom: A History of US draws on materials from the Gilder Lehrman Collection and photographs from the Meserve Kunhardt Collection. These artifacts present a few of the Americans who fought and, in some cases, died in the cause of freedom. We hope that the legacy of their struggle will resonate for Americans as they face the challenges of the future.

Susan F. Saidenberg
James G. Basker
Peter Kunhardt
Curators

Section One: The Founding Era

The colonists took up arms vowing to defend their liberties, resolving they would “Rather die free than be enslaved by Great Britain.” The Declaration of Independence held the promise of a federation of free and independent states founded for the first time ever with the consent of the governed.

Once the Revolution had been won, the challenge of creating a stable government overshadowed the ideals of liberty and equality. During summer of 1787, delegates struggled to craft a constitution that would balance the rights of individuals and states with the powers of a central government. A comparison of the first draft and final printed version reveals the complexity and contingency of the process. Slavery was the most divisive issue. A clause requiring the return of fugitive slaves, obliquely referred to as “servants”, was added to ensure that southern states would ratify the Constitution. For all the tension, delegates also changed the list of states in the first draft to the deeply symbolic phrase “we the people,” emphasizing the nation over the thirteen individual states.

The Constitution embodied both an ideal and a compromise– a democratic government that tolerated the institution of slavery. Some leaders, such as George Washington, recognized the threat that slavery posed to the future of the nation and hoped that slavery would soon end. Washington vowed never to purchase another slave, and took steps to free his slaves at his death.

[1.] Paul Revere. “The Bloody Massacre perpetrated in King-Street, Boston on March 5, 1770,” 1770.

This hand-colored engraving by Paul Revere, patriot and artisan, elevates a street skirmish in Boston in 1770 into a “Massacre.” A brilliant piece of propaganda, it united the colonists’ sentiments against “repressive” policies of the British. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[2.] John Adams, letter to Catharine Macaulay, 11 December 1773.

John Adams, leading patriot and later the second president of the United States, comments on the growing resentment of colonists of laws that limited their rights to trade. Written at the time of the Boston Tea Party, when Colonists dumped tea rather than pay taxes imposed by the British parliament, Adams asserts “nothing but equal Liberty and kind Treatment will secure [allegiance]” (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[3.] “Declaration of Independence,” printed by Peter Timothy in Charleston, S.C., ca. 2 August 1776.

Thomas Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence. The revolutionary generation cited the Declaration as the instrument affirming the right of people to establish a government responsive to the public good. Later generations, the abolitionists and Lincoln among them, cited the passage on inalienable rights of men, implicit at the nation’s founding, to underscore their opposition to slavery. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[4.] George Washington, letter to John F. Mercer, 9 September 1786.

In this letter, written at a time when he owned 250 slaves, Washington avows his dislike of the institution of slavery, an institution that violates the ideal of freedom and equality. “I never mean... to possess another slave by purchase; it being among my first wishes to see some plan adopted by which slavery in this Country may be abolished....” He looks to legislators to pass laws ending nation’s most troubling issue. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[5.] First draft of the United States Constitution, with notes and changes in the handwriting of Pierce Butler, 6 August 1787.

This copy of the draft of the Constitution was printed secretly for the delegates with wide margins for notes. Delegate Pierce Butler, one of the wealthiest slaveholders from South Carolina, added the clause requiring the return of fugitives to their owners. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[6.] United States Constitution, printed for members of the Constitutional Convention, inscribed by Benjamin Franklin to Jonathan Williams, 17 September 1787.

The first official printed version of the Constitution was distributed to the delegates, among whom Benjamin Franklin, aged 81, was the senior member. Franklin underlined the passages legalizing rights of individuals in cases of bankruptcies and standards of punishment, principles he championed throughout his life. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[7.] Mercy O. Warren, letter to Catharine Macaulay, 28 September 1787.

Mercy Otis Warren and Catherine Macaulay, the British recipient of this letter, were exceptionally astute historians and commentators on political affairs, in an age when men dominated public life. Warren writes, “we have struggled for liberty & made lofty sacrifices at her shrine: and there are still many among us who revere her name [Liberty] too much to relinquish...the rights of man for the Dignity of Government.” (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[8.] Phillis Wheatley. *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*. London, 1773.

Phillis Wheatley, the nation’s first published African American poet, was enslaved as a child, transported to Boston, and later freed. She published this first book of poetry in 1773. In 1775 she dedicated a poem to George Washington, symbol of liberty. “Proceed, great chief, with virtue on thy side, Thy ev’ry action let the goddess guide.” (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[9.] Sebastien Bauman’s map of “the investment of York and Gloucester” [Yorktown], engraved by Robert Scot, 1782.

Bauman, a soldier at Battle of Yorktown, drew this map at the request of General George Washington, to commemorate the turning point in Revolutionary War. The British surrendered three months after the battle. The colonists realized the ideals of independence and freedom. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[10.] Peter Kiteridge, letter to Selectmen of Medfield, Mass., 6 April 1806.

Over five thousand African Americans volunteered to fight in the Revolutionary War, linking their futures and freedom to the cause of the colonists. During his five years of service, Peter Kiteridge sustained debilitating injuries. As an old man, he sought some assistance for his family in recognition of his service to the nation. Kiteridge, illiterate, signs the petition with an “X.” (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

Section Two: The Young Republic

Between 1800 and 1840, the new nation doubled in size. Debates about how to govern these vast new territories tested the fragile compromise over slavery, and both supporters and opponents of the extension of slavery invoked the Constitution. Many Americans argued that a republic dedicated to the well-being of the majority must offer people the opportunity to share in the nation's prosperity. Slaveholders claimed that Constitutional protection of their property sanctioned their right to take slaves into the new states and territories.

Abolitionism, though a small movement, gained momentum during the first decades of the 19th century. In the 1830s, when William Lloyd Garrison founded the American Anti-Slavery Society, fellow reformers rushed to establish chapters in northern states. Their campaign disseminated hundreds of thousands of broadsides across the nation, such as "Home of the Free; Land of the Oppressed," that denounced slavery as incompatible with democracy. Former President John Quincy Adams fought the "gag rule" barring the presentation of anti-slavery petitions in the House of Representatives, and successfully sought freedom for the African slaves in the famous *Amistad* case. Such stories illustrate the challenges met by early fighters for freedom.

[1.] Thomas Jefferson, letter to David Howell, 15 December 1810.

In this letter written during his retirement, Jefferson reaffirms his faith in republican principles: "I conscientiously believe that governments founded in them are most friendly to the happiness of the people at large; and especially of a people so capable of self government as ours." Despite his private misgivings, publicly Jefferson remained silent on slavery. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[2.] John Melish. "A Map of the United States with the contiguous British & Spanish possessions," 1820.

This map, drawn after the Missouri Compromise, depicts the territories added to the nation as of 1820. The rancorous debate over the admission of Missouri as a free or slave state was, according to James Madison, "the dreadful fruitfulness of the original sin of the African trade." (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[3.] William L. Garrison, letter to Ebenezer Dole, 14 July 1830.

Written from prison, William Lloyd Garrison, ardent abolitionist leader, observes that even prison for the white man cannot compare to the life sentence of slavery. A slave lives in fear that "for the most trifling offense...he may be scourged on his back till it streams with

blood,” and “torn from [his family] or them from him at any moment, never again to meet on earth.” (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[4.] Henry Clay, letter to John Switzer, 19 May 1831.

Henry Clay declared slavery “a manifest violation of the rights of man,” but concluded that it fell to the states rather than to the federal government to end slavery.(The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[5.] David Crockett, letter to Charles Stanton, 25 December 1834.

David Crockett, like many Americans, looked to the West as a place to make a new beginning, or to escape tyrannical presidents who treated citizens like “Volunteer Slaves.” Crockett vows to leave because “our boasted land of liberty have almost bowed to the yoke of...bondage.” (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[6.] “Slave Market of America.” Published by the American Anti-Slavery Society, New York, 1836.

Beginning in the 1830s, abolitionist societies printed millions of broadsides to expose the brutality of slavery. “Slave Market of America” asserts that slavery violates the Bible, the Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution. The image of Washington D.C. as home of the free is eclipsed by an image of the nation’s capital on the right as “Land of the Oppressed.” (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[7.] John Q. Adams, letter to the inhabitants of the 12th Congressional District of Massachusetts, 3 March 1837.

Congressman Adams writes to his constituents in Massachusetts to defend his defiance of the House “gag” rule. He writes, “the stake in question is your right of Petition, your freedom of thought and of action, and the Freedom of Speech in Congress of your Representative.” (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[8.] Advertisement for John Warner Barber’s *A History of the Amistad Captives*, New Haven, Conn., 1840.

“Death of Capt. Ferrer,” this illustration advertising the forthcoming book on the *Amistad*, subtly reveals the heroism of the slaves who revolted. The book promises a detailed account of how “the African captives... in order to obtain their freedom and return to Africa rose upon the Captain and the crew of the vessel.” (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[9.] John Q. Adams, letter to Roger S. Baldwin, 11 November 1840.

Abolitionists had written to John Quincy Adams asking him to represent the *Amistad* captives’ petition for freedom before the Supreme Court. Here, with characteristic humility, Adams accepts, hoping he will “do justice to their cause.” Adams spoke before the Court for nine hours, which moved the majority to decide in favor of the captives. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

Section Three: A Firebell in the Night

By the 1850s, slavery had become the testing ground for competing visions of America. Legislation and judicial decisions intensified the antagonism between northern proponents of free labor and southern defenders of the states' rights and property rights. After the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, and the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, bloody confrontations took place in Kansas between abolitionists and pro-slavery advocates.

Public support for abolition grew, spurred in part by the writings and activities of Frederick Douglass, an escaped slave and the nation's foremost black abolitionist. Defying the claim that slaves were contented, Douglass wrote in his *Narrative*, "The wretchedness of slavery and the blessedness of freedom were perpetually before me. It was life and death to me." Yet in 1857, in the case of Dred Scott, the Supreme Court ruled that slaves and free blacks were not citizens and, therefore, not protected by the Constitution of the United States.

Issues of slavery and freedom dominated the campaign of Abraham Lincoln, who ran for the US Senate against Stephen Douglas in 1857-58. Lincoln saw the extension of slavery as a national crisis, and predicted that "a house divided cannot stand." Lincoln lost the election, but his powerful oratory and argument, linking opposition to slavery to the founding principles of American democracy, brought him national attention, and influenced the nation's political agenda.

[1.] "Read and Ponder the Fugitive Slave Law." Boston, 1850.

The Fugitive Slave Law, a provision of the Compromise of 1850, authorized the seizure of any African American accused of being a runaway slave solely on the basis of the purported owner's word. Opponents of slavery also protested a provision requiring all citizens to assist in apprehending fugitive slaves. This broadside denounces a law that disregards the "ordinary securities of PERSONAL LIBERTY, which tramples on the Constitution by its denial of the sacred rights of Trial by jury...." (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[2.] Textile illustrating *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, ca. 1852.

This textile depicts scenes from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, written by Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1852. A best seller, the book sold more than one million copies. The novel tells two stories of redemption of Tom, a field slave, and of Eliza, a fair-skinned household servant. Stowe's pointed reference to the Hebrews' deliverance from bondage in Egypt heightened awareness of the moral evils of slavery for 19th-century Americans. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[3.] Harriet Beecher Stowe, letter to Ralph Wardlaw, 14 December 1852.

With the popularity of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe became an international celebrity. Replying to an invitation to speak before a Scottish abolitionist group, Stowe writes that she is putting to press “a Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin containing all the facts & documents which confirm the story – truth darker & sadder & more painful to write than the fiction was.” (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[4.] Abolitionist Flag of the United States, ca. 1858.

This unique handmade abolitionist flag measures 10 feet x 5 feet. It has only nine stripes and twenty stars, deliberately excluding the Southern slave states. The flag was found in Cherry Valley, Ohio, in an inn frequented by John Brown and his militant supporters. The flag was discovered in 1996 and is here being displayed to the public for the first time. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[5.] Louis Adolph Gautier engraving of “Stump Speaking,” a painting by George C. Bingham. New York, 1856.

This engraving is based on one of a series of paintings by George Caleb Bingham on the subject of the nation's free electoral process. The bucolic scene, which depicts calm public discussion between citizens and candidates, is testimony to Bingham's faith that democratic debate and elections might resolve the divisions in the nation during the 1850s. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[6.] Salmon P. Chase, letter to Judge Alexander L. Latty, 26 January 1856.

Salmon P. Chase feared that the extension of slavery into the new territories would inhibit immigration and the growth of the free population. His letter illustrates how the abolitionists successfully merged their campaign to end slavery with national issues about free labor and immigration. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[7.] Abraham Lincoln, manuscript speech fragment about slavery and American government, ca. 1857-1858.

Here, Lincoln articulates two principles that informed his vision: government founded on equal rights, and a faith in self-improvement as key to the future of America. He notes that every slave knows he has been wronged when denied the fruits of his labor: “Most

governments have been based, practically, on the denial of the equal rights of men... ours began by affirming those rights.... We proposed to give all a chance, and we expected the weak to grow stronger, the ignorant, wiser and all better and happier together." (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[8.] John Brown, letter to his wife Mary and children, 16 April 1857.

As a militant abolitionist, Brown believed that only violence would end slavery. Brown led a group of men in skirmishes and raids. Writing to his wife, he vows to return "with Irons in rather than upon my hands." A year and a half later, Brown was captured and hanged after his group seized the government arsenal at Harpers Ferry, trying to foment a violent rebellion. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[9.] Frederick Douglass, letter to Hugh Auld, 4 October 1857.

Following his escape from slavery in Maryland to freedom New York City in 1838, Frederick Douglass became the most influential speaker on behalf of abolition. Here, in an extraordinary display of forgiveness, Douglass writes to Hugh Auld, his former master: "I have often felt a strong desire to hold a little correspondence with you and to learn something of the position and prospects of your dear children. They were dear to me – and are still – indeed I feel nothing but kindness for you all – I love you but hate slavery." (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[10.] Abraham Lincoln, manuscript fragment of "House divided" speech, ca. 1857.

(The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[11.] Abraham Lincoln, manuscript speech fragment, about the abolition of slavery, ca. July 1858.

Speaking to voters during his campaign for the U.S. Senate, Lincoln recalled the long struggle to abolish slavery in Great Britain. He observes that the abolition of slavery "may not be completely attained within... the term of my [natural] life.... Even in this view, I am proud, in my passing speck of time, to contribute an humble mite to that glorious consummation, which my own poor eyes may [not] last to see." (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

Section Four: The Civil War

Part I: The Union Threatened: The Union Preserved

On January 1, 1863, when the Emancipation Proclamation became effective, slaves in the states in rebellion were declared, “forever free.” It was both a tactical war measure and a transformation of the national purpose. Strategically, it undermined the Confederacy and bolstered the Union army with the prospect of African American enlistment. Though it was to weaken the Republican Party in the election of 1864, the Proclamation made the war into a fight to end slavery.

African Americans had known all along that the “war to save the Union” was also a war that would determine their future. Beginning in 1861, free blacks had petitioned to be allowed to serve in the army, while in the South slaves staged work slowdowns and others sought refuge behind Union lines.

After the Emancipation Proclamation, African Americans in all states rushed to enlist in response to recruitment overtures such as “Men of Color: to Arms!” By the war’s end, as many as 250,000 African Americans had served in Union forces. Their valor changed public perceptions forever.

Emancipation and military experience, in turn, opened new horizons of possibility for all African Americans.

[1.] “The Union is dissolved!” *Charleston Mercury*, extra edition, 20 December 1860.

The election of Lincoln convinced Southern states that the federal government would initiate judicial and legal action against slavery. This broadside was printed in Charleston, SC on December 20, 1860, when South Carolina voted to repeal the Constitution of the United States, and seceded from the Union. The Constitution of the new Confederacy would sanction the unrestricted right to hold slaves. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[2.] Photograph of Abraham Lincoln, printed in 1897 from original negative, 3 June 1860.

Abraham Lincoln posed for this photograph by Alexander Hesler in Springfield, Illinois, soon after winning the Republican Nomination for President. He appears serious, confident and youthful at fifty-one. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[3.] “Lloyd’s New Political Chart, 1861.” New York, 1861.

This broadside depicts the United States as the Civil War broke out, crystallizing the division between free and slave states. Lincoln is surrounded by his Cabinet and military

leaders, including Major Robert Anderson, commander at Fort Sumter. Thirty-one million people lived in the United States, of whom 4,700,000 white males voted in the 1860 election. Lincoln received not a single vote in Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Florida, Texas, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Virginia. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[4.] Henry C. Parrott, letter to his sister, October 1862.

Henry Parrott, lieutenant in the 75th Illinois Volunteers, writes to his sister, “we were pretty well cut to pieces at Perryville [Kentucky].” Parrott quotes Homer to describe the horror of the battle: “the boys fell around me as fast as grass before a scythe.” (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[5.] George W. Tillotson, letter to his wife, 5-6 February 1863.

As the war continued, some soldiers began to question its cost. Henry Tillotson from Greene, New York, fears that the war will leave the union with “bankrupt government and ourselves being the worst taxed slaves that the world afford.” He wonders about the future of the Union: “even could South be whiped back into the Union... what kind of union do you suppose it would be?” (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[6.] Joseph Jones, letter to Nancy E. Jones, undated [ca. September 1862].

Joseph Jones from Monroe, Illinois, enlisted as a private in the 79th Illinois Infantry. His ardor is evident. Writing to his wife, Nancy, in September 1862, he declares, “we are the only troops that has no guns, but i reckon if they dont arm us we can fight with our fist and clubs we are not afraid of any thing.” (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[7.] Jeremiah M. Tate, letter to Dear Sister Mary, 10 May 1863.

Having seen two years military experience since he enlisted in the Confederate Army at age 14, Jeremiah Tate describes the Battle of Chancellorsville. “On sunday I witness the awfulest sight that the eyes of man ever beheld, that was I saw many of our poor wounded that was burned to det afte they wer wounded and all so hundreds of the enemy, it was caused by the woods taking on fire from the explosion of shells, the ambulance core could not bare the wounded of faste enoughf....” (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[8.] Ulysses S. Grant, letter to Stephen A. Hurlbut, 31 May 1863.

Ulysses Grant's successes in the western campaign eventually moved Lincoln to appoint him General of the Army of the Potomac. This letter, deploying replacement troops, testifies to Grant's military strategy at the Battle of Vicksburg. He orders additional troops brought up to reinforce the Union army: "The entire rebel force heretofore against me is completely at my mercy. I do not to so their to escape by being reinforced from elsewhere." (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[9.] Abraham Lincoln, handwritten telegram to Ulysses S. Grant, 15 June 1864.

Lincoln came to see that Grant had the strategic vision to win the war. He wrote this telegram in the early hours of the morning after a typical long night vetting incoming military reports. Lincoln expresses confidence in Grant's plan to capture Richmond and end the war. "I begin to see it. You will succeed. God bless you all." (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[10.] General Order No. 9, signed by Robert E. Lee, 10 April 1865.

By April 1865 Confederate General Robert E. Lee's forces were surrounded and decimated. Lee acknowledged defeat: "The Army ... has been compelled to yield to overwhelming numbers and resources." Three quarters of all white men in the South had served in the war. By the time of the surrender at Appomattox, Lee's army had fewer than 35,000 men, compared to Grant's total of 113,000 men. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

Part II: The Civil War

In 1860 the election of Abraham Lincoln, who opposed the extension of slavery, precipitated the secession of southern states. In his inaugural address, President Lincoln vowed to preserve the United States, a republic governed by popular suffrage, majority rule, and the Constitution. In contrast, the new constitution of the Confederacy explicitly sanctioned the unlimited right to hold human beings in bondage.

The Civil War encompassed Lincoln's entire presidency. To his role Lincoln brought an ability to grasp the large military objectives, a politician's sensitivity to the popular mood, and, above all, the

ability to translate war aims into powerful and compelling rhetoric. “We know how to save the union. In *giving* freedom to the slave, we *assure* freedom for the free....”

Despite hopes for an early end, the war lasted four years. Its history became an ever-growing list of battles whose names – Bull Run, Antietam, Gettysburg, and Vicksburg – are now etched in the nation’s memory. Despite many setbacks and grievous losses, the Union and its vision of freedom ultimately triumphed. On April 10, 1865 the Army of Virginia, under Robert E. Lee, signed the surrender agreement at Appomattox, exhibited here.

Part III: Emancipation

[1.] “Men of Color, to Arms! to Arms!” Philadelphia, ca. 1863.

During the early years of the Civil War, Frederick Douglass had lobbied the President to organize black regiments and proclaim emancipation. The President postponed the decision, awaiting a favorable political climate. After emancipation, Douglass toured the country leading recruitment drives, entreating African Americans to “join in Fighting the Battles of Liberty and the Union.” (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[2.] “Fremont’s Proclamation.” St. Louis, 30 August 1861.

In August 1861 Fremont, Commander of the Union forces in Missouri, issued an order freeing slaves of Confederate sympathizers. Lincoln, angry at the usurpation of his authority and fearing it would alienate Union supporters in the South, rescinded the order. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[3.] John Jones, letter to his wife, 3 October 1862.

Jones was an ordinary Union soldier in the western theater of war. When he heard that the President would issue an Emancipation Proclamation, he wrote: “ ‘ the year of Jubilee’ has indeed come to the poor Slave. ... The name of Abraham Lincoln will be handed down to posterity as one the greatest benefactors of his country, not surpassed by the immortal Washington...” (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[4.] “The Gallant Charge of the Fifty Fourth Massachusetts (Colored) Regiment.” Published by Currier & Ives, New York, 1863.

The 54th Massachusetts Colored Regiment was organized in February 1863. Many Union soldiers doubted the bravery of the new African American soldiers. In July 1863, the 54th Massachusetts led a bloody and unsuccessful assault on Fort Wagner, South Carolina, losing their commander and 272 of 650 men. Such valor did much to change public opinion about black troops. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[5.] “Emancipation Proclamation,” engraving published in San Francisco, 1864, signed by Abraham Lincoln.

The Emancipation Proclamation was a carefully crafted document in which Lincoln, as Commander in Chief, justified emancipation as a military act against the states in rebellion. In reality, it transformed the war into a moral crusade to end slavery. This extremely rare lithograph, with suitably patriotic decoration, was designed by a fourteen-year-old boy from California. This engraved was sent to Washington where Lincoln signed it. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[6.] “Writing the Emancipation Proclamation,” a satiric etching by “V. Blada” [Adalbert J. Volck], ca. 1863.

The Emancipation Proclamation, the keystone of Lincoln’s policy to end slavery, caused controversy even within the Union. In this savagely racist cartoon, Volck, a Confederate sympathizer living in Baltimore, depicts a disheveled Lincoln composing the proclamation with ink proffered by the devil, while trampling the Constitution underfoot. The room is hung with paintings of the 1791 slave rebellion in Santo Domingo and the violent abolitionist John Brown depicted as a saint. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[7.] Personal diary of William P. Woodlin, a soldier in the 8th U.S. Colored Troops, Company G, December 1863 - October 1864.

(The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[8.] “The First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation,” engraving based on an 1864 painting by Francis B. Carpenter, Philadelphia, 1866.

This is one of many engravings reprinted from Carpenter's dramatic painting, authorized by Lincoln himself and completed after several sittings in April 1864. The engravings were powerful tools in garnering national support for emancipation.

[CASE]

[A.] Frederick Douglass. *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass. Written by himself.* Boston, 1845.

Copy coming... (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[B.] William Brunt, letter to Martha [Wier], 2 December 1863.

After Emancipation William Brunt, a Union captain serving in Tennessee, wrote with great joy of his appointment to recruit for the 16th U.S. Colored Infantry. "My glory has been increased until I fear I shall collapse. But I will try to bear it as it becomes a man... it is glorious to enlist the oppressed it is certainly doubly so to be privileged to lead them against their oppressors." (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[C.] Photograph of anonymous private, Company I, 54th Massachusetts Infantry, ca. 1863.

Even as they were authorized to enlist in the Union Army, African Americans still faced discrimination. They were relegated to separate regiments commanded by white officers and received less pay than white soldiers. Nonetheless, the pride evident in this soldier's portrait confirms Frederick Douglass's prediction that Americans would respect the black soldier once he had "an eagle on his button, a musket on his shoulder, and the star spangled banner over his head." (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[D.] Abraham Lincoln, manuscript note to Edwin M. Stanton, 12 May 1863.

After Emancipation, Lincoln called for the creation of four "Colored Regiments." Writing to his Secretary of War, Edward Stanton, Lincoln urges support for the organizers of these regiments, knowing that African American soldiers would face opposition and discrimination in a racist society. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

Part IV: The Price of Freedom

The preservation of the union and the emancipation of four million African Americans exacted a bitter cost. The Civil War was the bloodiest in the nation's history. Some 620,000 soldiers died, more Americans than in WWI and WWII combined, and comparable numbers were wounded or suffered from disease, hardship and wretched medical care. In ways beyond measure, the destruction ravaged families, communities, whole cities, and economies.

For many Americans, the biggest price was the loss of the nation's greatest president. Lincoln's courageous leadership during the war had preserved a nation and ended slavery. In his second inaugural address, Lincoln urged that the nation be guided "with malice towards none, with charity for all." A month later, on April 11, 1865, the President spoke publicly about his vision for rebuilding the nation with the help of four million former slaves. In the audience that day was John Wilkes Booth, a virulent racist who vowed to stop the man who promised citizenship for African Americans. Three days later, Booth murdered Lincoln and the trajectory of American history changed forever.

[1.] "When this cruel war is over." Songsheet printed ca. 1864.

One of the most popular Civil War ballads, "When this cruel war is over" was distributed and sung by both Union and Confederate soldiers. The lyrics speak of loss, separation, and patriotism in ways that mirror the emotions expressed in thousands of Civil War soldiers' letters in the Collection. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[2-3.] Photograph of Mary Kelly, wife of Union soldier James R. Kelly, undated [1860s].

Mary Kelly, letter to Sarah Gordon, 31 [March 1862].

James Kelly served with the 14th Indiana Volunteers beginning in 1861. In March 1862 his wife Mary traveled to the field hospital where he lay wounded, and described the terrible conditions. "The wounded are dying every day. This is a three story building and very large at that and every room is full. It is sad times indeed." Despite her efforts, James Kelly died of his wounds on May 8, 1862. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[4.] Fred Wilkinson, letter to Amanda Wilkinson, 16 November 1861.

Knowing that he would not be home for the upcoming birth of their first child, Fred Wilkinson of Company G, Second Michigan Infantry, writes to his wife: "My love for you grows stronger everyday...I hope that you will not feel sad because I am not with you as your friends husbands are with them, remember that you have more cause to rejoice that

you have a husband contending for the Constitution and flag of his country.” (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[5.] David V. Smith, letter to [Elizabeth Smith], 10 July 1863.

A private in the 12th New Jersey, writing just days after the Battle of Gettysburg, Smith describes Pickett’s charge on the second day: “We held our fire & lay Behind the Stone fence and until they come within easy Range & then we opened on them & we cut them down by thousand so much so that the ground was literly covered with dead and wounded as far as we could see our loss in the centre was light. Some of the wounded had to lay on the field 48 hours as the Rebel sharpshooter would not let us take them off...” Smith died on October 10, 1863. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[6.] Selections from a sketchbook of watercolors by Henry Berckhoff, a private in Company B, 8th New York Infantry, 1861 - 1863.

Henry Berckhoff was twenty when he enlisted. These watercolor sketches, which he painted during his service, are a visual record of what war looked like to an ordinary soldier who was also a skilled artist. They provide a vivid pictorial counterpart to the verbal depictions offered in thousands of soldiers’ letters elsewhere in the Collection.

Left hand series, from the top. The company set up camp on east on 58th in Manhattan in April 1861 and marched off to “the seat of war.” The group of pictures depicting the battles of Haymarket, Salem, and in the Shenandoah Valley, convey a sense of the chaotic yet heroic nature of Union battles.

Right hand series, from the top. In these watercolors, Berckhoff records the daily life of the soldier: A lone sentry standing guard on the Potomac, or soldiers camping out in a thunderstorm. “Morning Scene” depicts the minutia of camp life and personal tasks such as doing the laundry, cooking food, washing up and shaving by a mirror hung from a tree branch.

(All from The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[7.] Joseph Maitland, letter to Belle Wharton, 25 February 1865.

Belle Wharton, letter to Joseph Maitland, 9 March 1865.

War wreaked havoc in many ways, including on romance. Joseph Maitland, a sergeant in Company G, 95th Ohio Infantry, corresponded with his sweetheart, Belle Wharton, for three years before proposing marriage. “[If] one who is poor in worldly things ...were to make a proposition of matrimony to you what would you say?” Without yet having received this letter from Joseph, Belle revealed her passion as well: “There is nothing in the world that gives more pleasure than to receive letters from you. Besides the pleasure of reading the letters it is some satisfaction to have and look at...that were in your hands such a short time before...” Maitland survived the war, returned to Ohio, and married Belle. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[8.] “The President is Dead!” New York, 15 April 1865.

This poster reproduces a telegram sent by Secretary of War Edward Stanton to Major General John Dix, military commander of the Department of the East in New York City. The large font of the poster reflects its usage as a public announcement posted on the streets of New York. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[9.] Frederick Douglass, letter to Mary Todd Lincoln, 17 August 1865.

Over the course of the war, and despite initial differences, Douglass and President Lincoln forged a relationship based on a shared vision. After Lincoln’s assassination, Douglass wrote Mrs. Lincoln to thank her for giving him the gift of the President’s favorite walking stick, “a token not only merely of the kind consideration in which I have reason to know that the President was pleased to hold me personally, but as an indication of his humane interest [in the] welfare of my whole race.” (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

Section Five: Epilogue

The Civil War marked a turning point, an expansion in the idea of freedom in the nation's history. At the Gettysburg battlefield President Abraham Lincoln exhorted Americans to dedicate themselves to a "new birth of Freedom." Following the war, three Constitutional amendments ended slavery, granted African Americans equal rights, and gave black men the vote. The events of the decade laid the foundation for the growth of freedom in the future. But in the decades that followed the Civil War, the realization of that freedom remained an unfulfilled promise.

The struggle gained momentum in the 20th century. In 1920, after seven decades of advocacy and activism, women obtained the right to vote. In the 1950s and '60s, inspired by the leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr., men and women across the nation marched and campaigned to achieve full political and civil equality for African Americans.

As America enters a new century, it is worth recalling past struggles for freedom and reaffirming the ideals from our past that will sustain us into the future.

[1.] "The Fifteenth Amendment Celebrated." New York, 1870.

The passage of the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth amendments gave constitutional status to Emancipation's promise of freedom. The artist depicts African Americans' hopes for their future under freedom: the right to education, a stable family life, jobs, and the vote. Surrounding the scene of celebration in Washington D.C. are portraits of Douglass and Lincoln, icons of the quest for freedom. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[2.] Susan B. Anthony, letter to C. J. Folger, 7 July 1867.

In 1867, Susan B. Anthony, a lifelong leader for women's suffrage, wrote to New York State Senator Folger urging him to support an amendment to the New York Constitution that would grant women the power to vote, arguing that "suffrage is the one right which no one person or class has the right to give or withhold." The presence of Frederick Douglass's name on the masthead of the American Equal Rights Association's letterhead symbolizes the convergent drives for freedom of all Americans. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[3.] Susan B. Anthony, et al. *An Appeal to the Women of the United States*. Hartford, Conn., 1871.

Emboldened by the passage of the fifteen amendment, suffrage leaders redoubled their efforts to convince American women that suffrage was "your rights as citizens of the United States." Support for suffrage would insure that "these great questions of freedom and responsibility sweep on." In 1872, Susan B. Anthony registered and voted. She was

convicted for voting illegally, and jailed for defending her freedom to vote. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[4.] Frederick Douglass, letter to Robert Adams, 4 December 1888.

In the decades after the Civil War, Southern whites, exploiting fears of black domination and the destruction of “white values,” began to deprive African Americans of their constitutional rights. Disturbed by “the clamor raised for the disenfranchisement of colored voters,” Douglass wrote: “The cry about negro supremacy is like the old cry you and I so often heard in the old time about the negroes going to cut their masters throats. It’s all humbug.” (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[5.] Photograph of Frederick Douglass, ca. 1870.

[6.] Woodrow Wilson, letter to Carrie C. Catt, 25 January 1917.

The women’s suffrage movement gained momentum as several states in the West, among them North Dakota, passed women’s voting rights bills. President Woodrow Wilson wrote to Carrie Catt, president of the National American

Women’s Suffrage Association: “You know that I have a very real interest in the extension of suffrage to the women.” The nineteenth amendment granting women the right to vote became law in 1920. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[7.] Martin Luther King, Jr. *Stride Towards Freedom: The Montgomery Story*. New York, 1958. Copy signed by Dr. King.

Martin Luther King, Jr., a young Baptist minister, first came to national attention in 1955 during the successful boycott of segregation on public buses in Montgomery, Alabama. King practiced a philosophy of non-violence – persuasion through words, deeds, and even suffering to achieve freedom. King inscribed this copy to Tom Thrasher, an Episcopal minister, “In appreciation for your genuine good will, your true Christian spirit, your dedication to the ideal of the brotherhood of man and your willingness, even under criticism, to keep the desperately needed channels of communication open between the races.” (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[8.] Martin Luther King, Jr., text of speech delivered at Yale University, 14 January 1959, with King's handwritten changes.

Invited to speak about the future of integration, King told his audience that to understand the future we must understand the past. He divided the history of race relations into three periods: "Slavery" 1619 to 1865, "Restricted Emancipation" 1865 to 1954, and "Constructive Integration," beginning in 1954. Only through peaceful action, King declared, "will we be able to emerge from the bleak and desolate midnight of man's inhumanity to man into the bright and glittering daybreak of freedom and justice. And then America will truly be the land of the free and the home of the brave." (The Gilder Lehrman Collection)

[9.] "I am a man." 4 April 1968.

On April 4, 1968, King traveled to Memphis to lead a peaceful march by garbage workers striking for equitable wages. The marchers carried these placards inscribed, "I am a man," echoing the famous anti-slavery slogan of the 1780s and 1790s, "Am I not a man, and a brother?"

Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his life for his convictions. Later that evening, after a day of marching with those who carried these signs, King was murdered by the petty thief and virulent racist James Earl Ray. But King's spirit lives on as the American ideal of freedom moves into the 21st century.