

Border States evinced no interest in emancipation even with compensation, and black spokesmen made it plain they disapproved of emigration. Lincoln decided that emancipation was the only measure which could bolster the sagging spirit of the Union army, provide a fresh pool of manpower for the armed forces, and convince world opinion that the Union cause was something more than an attempt to suppress the South's desire for independence. In July, 1862, he resolved upon emancipation, and in September issued a preliminary proclamation. On January 1, 1863, all slaves in areas not under the control of the Union army were declared forever free, and blacks were welcomed to enlist in the Union army.

The Emancipation Proclamation, many historians have observed, was a flawed document. It is by now customary to point out that where Lincoln had the power to free the slaves—in areas under Union control—he chose not to do so, and that he proclaimed emancipation only where he did not have the power to enforce it. Yet this argument overlooks the revolutionary change the Proclamation wrought in the war. From January 1, 1863, forward, the Union army became an agent of emancipation; wherever that army went, emancipation automatically followed. It was a recognition of this fundamental fact which led blacks throughout the nation to gather in their churches on New Year's Eve, singing hymns and celebrating the arrival of "the Year of Jubilee." For the same reason, Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy, condemned the Proclamation as "the most execrable measure recorded in the history of guilty man."

The Emancipation Proclamation thus ushered in a new period of black and American history. Yet there was still a war to be fought and blacks played a crucial role in winning it. From the very outset, free blacks had volunteered their services to the Union army, only to be turned away. In 1862, some commanders did begin organizing small units of blacks and in November of that year the War Department authorized the creation of an all-black regi-