

Emancipation Proclamation

On the first of January, 1863, the final proclamation of emancipation was issued, designating the States of Arkansas, Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina and certain portions of Louisiana and Virginia, as “this day in rebellion against the United States,” and proclaimed that, in virtue of his authority as commander-in-chief, and as a necessary war measure for suppressing rebellion, “I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated states and parts of states are and henceforward shall be free,” and pledging the executive and military power of the government to maintain such freedom. The legal validity of these proclamations was never pronounced upon by the national courts; but their decrees gradually enforced by the march of armies were soon recognized by public opinion to be practically irreversible. Such dissatisfaction as they caused in the border slave states died out in the stress of war. The systematic enlistment of Negroes and their incorporation into the army by regiments, hitherto only tried as exceptional experiments, were now pushed with vigor, and, being followed by several conspicuous instances of their gallantry on the battlefield, added another strong impulse to the sweeping change of popular sentiment. To put the finality of emancipation beyond all question, Lincoln in the winter session of 1863-1864 strongly supported a movement in Congress to abolish slavery by constitutional amendment, but the necessary two-thirds vote of the House of Representatives could not then be obtained. In his annual message of the 6th of December 1864, he urged the immediate passage of the measure. Congress now acted promptly: on the 31st of January 1865, that body by joint resolution proposed to the states the 13th amendment of the Federal Constitution, providing that “*neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime, whereof the party shall have been duly convicted shall exist within the United States or any place subject to their jurisdiction.*” Before the end of that year twenty-seven out of the thirty-six states of the Union (being the required three-fourths) had ratified the amendment, and official proclamation made by President Johnson on the 18th of December, 1865, declared it duly adopted.