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WHAT IF ABRAHAM LINCOLN HADN'T SIGNED THE EMANCIPATION  
PROCLAMATION?

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The United States has a great history from great people. Although several scholars may have varying opinions on the president's agenda and ideas in responding to the issue, it still defines the United States as a nation. Slavery was an issue of concern for more than two hundred years before president Lincoln took power. However, the belief of the president concerning slavery was part of the pressure to end slavery. President Lincoln began developing the emancipation proclamation which several individuals, especially from the south, were against it, and on January 1863, many slaves and white opponent of slavery around the nation were eagerly waiting to realize if the Lincoln would provide liberty to slaves.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, when the spread of freedom for slaves emerged, most African Americans were happy about the situation that many people took for granted, which was freedom.

Nevertheless, scholars have argued concerning the signing of the emancipation proclamation and argue what if Abraham Lincoln had not signed the document, what would happen. This has resulted in critical evaluations. Some historians stated that emancipation proclamation never freed slaves because it was only utilized in the protesting areas and the confederate regions were not freed.<sup>2</sup> Besides, the slaveholders in the confederate states were unwilling to receive the emancipation proclamation because they did not want to free slaves. Therefore, although emancipation proclamation never freed slaves, it altered the direction of the civil war, requiring the country to develop a solution to the slavery problem because the slaves distressed leaders for their independence in both words and actions. Therefore, this paper will

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<sup>1</sup> Krishnan, S. "A WAR FOR FREEDOM: SLAVERY AND THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION."

<sup>2</sup> Maxwell, Lori. "Emancipation proclamation (1863)." *Encyclopedia of American civil rights and liberties: Revised and expanded edition, [4 volumes]* (2017): 297.

focus on examining the activities and legislation that resulted in the signing of the emancipation proclamation and the responses and impacts of the emancipation proclamation. This will provide an understanding of the role of slaves in the civil war as well as evaluate who freed the slaves.

### **Determining Federal Slave Policy**

Before slavery began in the United States in the 1620s, the rich planters had servants who would work on a contract basis. Therefore, after the end of the contract, the servant was freed and given equipment to start their own lives.<sup>3</sup> However, by 1620, twenty Africans were brought to Jamestown, now the United States, by pirates and were exchanged for food. Similarly, England was also improving the economy because the tobacco farms were doing well and many people had come to Jamestown, hence reducing the number of servants. Since the servants purchased the Africans in exchange for food, and there was no contract between them, slavery began because they were taken as their master's property.

Moreover, by the 1800s, the slaves began to run away from their masters to seek refuge and freedom. As stated by Jesse, there was significant evidence regarding the African Americans' events and activities to pass through the white house when escaping.<sup>4</sup> For instance, the story of one slave that had run away from his master in Virginia and crossed Washington, DC, with the expectations of getting help such as food and rest. However, the slave stepped into the white house and the president stated that the white house was the last place he could seek help as a

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<sup>3</sup> Byers, Ann. *The Emancipation Proclamation*. Cavendish Square Publishing, LLC, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Holland, Jesse. *The invisible: The untold story of African American slaves in the White House*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2016.

slave because he will take him back to his master. This indicates how rampant slavery was if it can extend to the presidential residence. Similarly, another research by Bayers also stated that because of the increased slavery in the country, it was difficult to eliminate it due to the government officials also holding African Americans as slaves, for instance, Abraham Lincoln, vice president.<sup>5</sup>

President Abraham Lincoln held the office of the president from 1861 until 1865. This was the most critical period in the United States because it was accompanied by significant wars such as the civil war and the end of slavery. Similarly, during this time, the United States almost divided by the confederate states and those that supported the union. Nevertheless, President Lincoln had an outstanding character that enabled him to handle the situations. For instance, according to Elijah Fisher, president Lincoln did hate slavery and considered it immoral.<sup>6</sup> Besides, Lincoln claimed that so long as the negro is a man, his past faith has taught him that all men are equal. Lincoln was not sure if the constitution provided the federal administration with the authority to eliminate slavery in the states that existed to prevent it from spreading to other new western regions called states later. This made him to state that he had no determination, unswervingly or circuitously, to alter with slavery in the states that already existed during his first inaugural.

Moreover, the emancipation proclamation was due to substantial efforts of thinking and planning. Thus, President Lincoln worked hard and evaded absolute emancipation by rewarding

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<sup>5</sup> Byers, Ann. *The Emancipation Proclamation*. Cavendish Square Publishing, LLC, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Fisher, Elijah Q. "Abraham Lincoln and the Marathon of Emancipation." *The tenor of Our Times* 10, no. 1 (2021): 17.

states, particularly those at the border, to free the slaves themselves. Therefore, the president provided a system of remunerated, steady liberation and colonization of unconstrained slaves. Lincoln experienced momentous letters from the blacks and whites that needed slavery to be abolished. This gave him pressure and the war situations, which made him consider slavery and emancipation because more slaves moved to the union while searching for liberty.

Although the secretary for war in 1861 had suggested to president Lincoln concerning liberation and arming slaves. Lincoln declined since the military did not have a policy that could handle slaves since the African Americans could not be used in the fight intended to save the union. Nevertheless, Lincoln permitted the generals to develop their policies for handling slaves that run from their masters, which substantially increased the issue since the union army had gone into slaveholding regions. This made the majority of the slaves to went to the union army to seek help and protection. Still, they were returned to their masters when they asked for them because most generals were against liberation.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the confederates utilized slaves to overthrow the union by allowing them to develop fortifications. The union also started benefiting from southern slaves and liberated men, but they continued to be chattel property.

Allowing the generals to make their policies gave them authority, making them decide whether to return the runaway slaves or keep them. Therefore, in 1861, several slaves came to Monroe in search of freedom and Major general Benjamin Butler decided to break the fugitive slave act that required them to take back the slaves to their masters and kept the strong slaves.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Boyd, Miller Williams. "The exigencies of war: Black military service, free labor, and education in Civil War Missouri." (2016).

<sup>8</sup> Byers, Ann. *The Emancipation Proclamation*. Cavendish Square Publishing, LLC, 2018.

This allowed him to use them in digging trenches and they were referred to as contraband. The term spread and Butler consulted his superior if his policy is acceptable and they responded it was fine because it was a degree of the requirement to withdraw the masters of their service. Butler's policy was accepted since the slaves were seized for military reasons.

Butler's policy was then forward to congressCongress, where it was passed as legislation. In 1861, the initial confiscation act was implemented, emphasizing that if the insurgents utilize the slaves against the union military, they can be seized by the union.<sup>9</sup> Also, almost the same time, on the passage of the confiscation act, Major General John Fremont stated martial law in Missouri and liberated slaves from Confederate supporters. This made Lincoln fire him because Missouri was at the border and faithful to the union; hence, the general did not follow the constitution and confiscation act.<sup>10</sup> Lincoln focused on stating that the war was based on saving the union and not about slavery, resulting in the opponent complaining to the president about differing emancipation. However, Lincoln decided to stand by emancipation of the Blacks for himself as the commander in chief and president.

Moreover, many soldiers in the union army helped and protected slaves when they run their way; this resulted in increased violence among the military and slaveholders when they come to take their property back. For instance, slaveholder Smoot was huted by stones when trying to take back his property.<sup>11</sup> This act indicates that the United States would have split

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<sup>9</sup> Ken, Drexler. *Emancipation Proclamation*. Library of Congress, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Boyd, Miller Williams. "The exigencies of war: Black military service, free labor, and education in Civil War Missouri." (2016).

<sup>11</sup> Bracey, Christopher A., and Cody J. Foster. *Gale Researcher Guide for: The Civil Rights Act of 1866*. Gale, Cengage Learning, 2018.

based on ideologies concerning slavery abolition. These acts by Fremont and other major generals in the Union army emancipating slaves pressured Congress towards emancipation. For instance, in April 1862, Congress accepted the rewarded liberation of slaves in Columbia, in June, Congress permitted the eradication of slavery in the regions. Similarly, Congress passed the second confiscation act in July the same year, liberating slaves of disloyal slaveholders, then trailed by the act which allowed the military not to return the slaves to the confederates because they were essential to the union army. Halstead allowed the Black individuals not to be called contrabands but to be treated as other white humans.

### **Preliminary Proclamation**

President Abraham Lincoln decided on liberating the slaves to safeguard the union. Therefore, Lincoln worked on a steady rewarded emancipation and colonization of the slaves that had attained liberty, however, he got slight support. Furthermore, the confederate states obstinately maintained on supporting slavery which made their property run for freedom on the union camps.<sup>12</sup> This made Lincoln provide rewards to those that free the slaves in the confederate states as well as any rioting states that needed to rejoin the union. The resident reasoning was to purchase the slaves as a government than free them because he needed to colonize the free individuals.

James Broomall and Reidy Joseph stated that they believed that as long as the Black stayed in the United States, they will continue to be the cause of friction since they will never

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<sup>12</sup> Byers, Ann. *The Emancipation Proclamation*. Cavendish Square Publishing, LLC, 2018.

have equal lives and access to resources as the white.<sup>13</sup> These authors concentrated on the racial dynamics of the country. President Lincoln's concept never worked because it faced substantial opponents, particularly from the African Americans and the protestors of slavery. Aisha Mathews argues that the increase in the war against slavery in the south resulted in disorderly life, which allowed many slaves to seepage without being realized by their masters because they were busy involved in the war.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, these conditions placed immense weight on the confederate states to have two options: to liberate the slaves or protect their slaves from escaping.

By 1862 in September, President Lincoln signed the emancipation proclamation. Abraham Lincoln stated that through the powers invested in him as the United States president declares in September 1963 that all slaves in the designated states shall hereafter be set free and forever.<sup>15</sup> Also, the freed slaves will not be segregated in the military because they should be allowed to serve in the navy and union army. Although the emancipation proclamation was signed in 1862 September, it allowed members to react to the dangers within one hundred days of its implementation in January 1863.

Although the signing was vital in freeing the slaves and changing the direction of the civil war. It was evident that things were not as good as they required because many African Americans had started to revolt against their masters and the American society was split.

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<sup>13</sup> Broomall, James J. "Joseph P. Reidy. Illusions of Emancipation: The Pursuit of Freedom and Equality in the Twilight of Slavery." (2020): 966-968.

<sup>14</sup> Matthews, Aisha. "Looking Back is Moving Forward: The Legacy of Negro Spirituals in the Civil Rights Movement."

<sup>15</sup> Lincoln, Abraham. *The Emancipation Proclamation*. Good Press, 2020.

Furthermore, most of the union military had turned to supporting the abolition of slavery, hence backing up emancipation and making it difficult for the runaway slaves to return to their masters irrespective of the slaveholder being faithful to the union or under the rebel.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, there was increased prejudice among the African Americans and the whites and was more prevalent in other regions, although the war appeared to inspire its weakening. Besides, by July 1862, Congress revoked the ban on Blacks working in the military because they were frightened that they could revolt against their masters. Others argued that the previous slaves are cowards and cannot handle combat.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the same source added that other groups believed the slaves could work well on farms and thus can also serve well in the military.

The emancipation proclamation had many opposers and supporters. For example, with some that require them to be armed and others opposed. Therefore, this created a great discordant problem. Although the president was certain of his idea of the confederate states freeing the slaves by themselves. And the proclamation did not have a direct impact on them but resulted in perceptible consequences because of their closeness to the southern states where liberation happened.<sup>18</sup> although president Lincoln was against the slavery issue, he did not liberate slaves because of the increased ethical reasons. Therefore, the main intention was to continue to preserve the union even if he had to liberate several slaves and others continue to be enslaved irrespective of the pressures from the slaves.

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<sup>16</sup> Cummings, Judy Dodge. *The Emancipation Proclamation*. ABDO, 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Krishnan, S. "A WAR FOR FREEDOM: SLAVERY AND THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION."

<sup>18</sup> Cummings, Judy Dodge. *The Emancipation Proclamation*. ABDO, 2016.

Slavery opponents received the emancipation proclamation with meetings, flares and processions. Judy Cummings states that most people disapproved of the liberations of slaves because it was not following the regulations of the Union military and for exit slavery in the border states integral. On the other hand, the majority of the northern population approved the initial proclamation to deteriorate the south and accelerate the culmination of the civil war. Similarly, the military personnel also had different responses based on the document. For instance, some of them approved the proclamation and the concept of liberation. At the same time, others resigned and quitted from the commission and went to their residencies because they were against the end of slavery. As Judy Cummings states, the emancipation proclamation enraged confederates states more than the unionist.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, Ann Byers claims that the border states reacted to the information with almost a collective disapproval. Some newspapers in the south did not involve the emancipation proclamation in their news.<sup>20</sup>

However, news concerning the initial proclamation spread immensely to the south and after several days, many African Americans were aware of the document. This made many masters shift their slaves to the interior and they responded by running away and leave working with the expectation of emancipation.<sup>21</sup> Also, the slaves did not differentiate between faithful and withdrawn states, making some of them in the border states thinking they were free, which enraged reliable slaveholders. For example, the National Archives have presented a letter written

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<sup>19</sup> Cummings, Judy Dodge. *The Emancipation Proclamation*. ABDO, 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Byers, Ann. *The Emancipation Proclamation*. Cavendish Square Publishing, LLC, 2018

<sup>21</sup> Matthews, Aisha. "Looking Back is Moving Forward: The Legacy of Negro Spirituals in the Civil Rights Movement."

by Annie Davis to president Lincoln concerning her freedom.<sup>22</sup> Annie wrote that she desires to be free and wanted the president to know if Maryland slaves were free.

Moreover, the south had a bitter condemnation of the order by presenting its indecisiveness in the region. Drexler Ken argued that President Lincoln did not have any jurisdiction in the south region and thus, the order should not have acted in the region.<sup>23</sup> This resulted in significant editorial reactions, which presented substantial fears concerning the proclamation. The terror of submissive insurgence is encouraged by the document and the impediment of confederate efforts to increase political gratitude abroad. The south was more resolute in preserving slavery, but the president expected the slaves to go away from their slaveholders and repudiate the protestors their work, weakening the military. This worked well as many slaves moved in large numbers before the proclamation. Therefore, the reason for signing the emancipation proclamation was the critical national war problem hence the need to grab valuable human resources from the border states, deal with fundamental republicans in Congress and abolish the slavery institutions that had divided the nation. Although slavery added to resulting the civil war, President Lincoln's emancipation proclamation stopped the slavery institutions and increased the war's culmination.

### **Emancipation Proclamation Taking Effect**

In January 1863, the emancipation proclamation was implemented and president Lincoln ensured the promise was satisfied. Lincoln viewed that the proclamation was the most vital and

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<sup>22</sup> National Archives. Letter from Annie Davis to Abraham Lincoln. (n.d)

<sup>23</sup> Ken, Drexler. Emancipation Proclamation. Library of Congress, 2019.

right thing to do based on the available situation because liberating the slaves was an act of justice.<sup>24</sup> The union army had the authority to provide liberation to the slaves in regions they passed; however, they had varying responses towards the document. As Maxwell Lori narrates, several soldiers were ready to die for the union and not slavery, while others were gratified fighting for all.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, when the slaves heard about their freedom on proclamation, they started liberating themselves by running away from the confederate states, which Lincoln had hoped. While many newspapers responded in similar ways to the proclamation, the North newspapers sustained emancipation. They stated that it was a revolution that altered the associations of the national administrations to the slavery institution. Several poems were developed to present the emotions of setting the slaves free. Nonetheless, some individuals in the border states did not approve the emancipation because freed slaves will move to the North in search of jobs hence creating significant job competition reducing the wages. Furthermore, other individuals complained that president Lincoln was not using his powers well because the emancipation proclamation was unlawful and unsuccessful.<sup>26</sup> Besides, Lincoln did not have the power to liberate slaves and others were afraid of servile insurgence.

On the other hand, the border states reacted violently to the emancipation because it could undermine slavery in the area hence resulting in a downfall in the south. The slaves ran to the Union camps, and the slaveholders could not retrieve them because the soldiers did not return them. Therefore, the masters decided to inform the governor concerning the issues of their

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<sup>24</sup> Fisher, Elijah Q. "Abraham Lincoln and the Marathon of Emancipation." *The tenor of Our Times* 10, no. 1 (2021): 17.

<sup>25</sup> Maxwell, Lori. "Emancipation proclamation (1863)." *Encyclopedia of American civil rights and liberties: Revised and expanded edition,[4 volumes]* (2017): 297.

<sup>26</sup> Cummings, Judy Dodge. *The Emancipation Proclamation*. ABDO, 2016.

property running away by stating that the union soldiers do not consider any proof provided by the slaveholders that the slaves belong to them because they follow what the slaves say they belong to secessionist. Slaves inserted pressure of emancipation that allowed states to free them; although Kentucky had more slaves and had opposed emancipation, the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment act forced them to free the slaves. Moreover, Drexler Ken suggested that the emancipation proclamation altered the direction of the civil war to be on slavery and that it would have three penalties: freeing the slaves, separation of the confederate and union states from the United States and exile of the white population of the confederacy.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, this did not happen, but the slaves did not know all run, but they acted free, with some refusing to work without pay and others inflicted more demands.

Moreover, the slaves reacted to emancipation in different ways. For instance, some altered their names as a means of indicating self-worth and manhood. Also, other freed slaves searched for their family members that were sold while men looked for their wives and families. The freedom for the slaves was not based on the beginning of their life but also the path to accountability, capable and decent citizens. For instance, in Missouri, most African Americans joined the military for wage to take care of their families and not because of the willingness to serve. Nevertheless, they reacted by moving to the cities and they were treated harshly.<sup>28</sup> Although contraband camps were normal and worked to offer the slaves with help and their families, the former slaves presented inspiring roles in the camps that made them be provided

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<sup>27</sup> Ken, Drexler. Emancipation Proclamation. Library of Congress, 2019.

<sup>28</sup> Matthews, Aisha. "Looking Back is Moving Forward: The Legacy of Negro Spirituals in the Civil Rights Movement."

with equal laws loyally directed to allow them to have a place in society, as a working-class with a reasonable view of self-support and development.<sup>29</sup> This made the emancipation league state that they should not be referred to as chattel but men and regarded to enhance education and work independently in the society; they also worked to develop a constructive view on the white liberators.

The emancipation proclamation allowed the slaves to serve in the union army and this provided them with a chance to prove themselves to be the same as the whites. The signing of the proclamation made the slaves have equal opportunity and could fight the slaveholders in similar terms. Liberated slaves in the confederate states were conscripted majorly because of attaining freedom for their families and themselves regardless of the dangers of being seized by the armed patrols. However, most of them considered it worth it to continue working in bondage.

Although the war department had increased discrimination against the African Americans, canceling the emancipation proclamation was not easy because the African Americans made it irreversible by forfeiting their lives to the nation and proving to be good and able similar to the white. As stated by Christopher Bracey, the black soldiers attacked Petersburg and made them be heroes. In 1864 it was acknowledged that the Black men were similar to the white. When prejudice ended in the United States Army, the African American soldiers could not be perceived as cowards.<sup>30</sup> They were endangered their life to be captured by the border states

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<sup>29</sup> Maxwell, Lori. "Emancipation proclamation (1863)." *Encyclopedia of American civil rights and liberties: Revised and expanded edition, [4 volumes]* (2017): 297.

<sup>30</sup> Bracey, Christopher A., and Cody J. Foster. *Gale Researcher Guide for: The Civil Rights Act of 1866*. Gale, Cengage Learning, 2018.

army who could sell them to slavery or kill them. This made the army and colonels an abolitionist and gave African Americans an opportunity by ending slavery.

### **Evaluation of Emancipation**

Emancipation proclamation played a key role in ending the civil war, preserving the union and freeing slaves. Although the proclamation never freed all slaves in US, it created a way that made every slave feel they are liberated by January of 1863. After the signing of the emancipation proclamation and which took effect in 1863, many slaves created songs that praise president Lincoln and are happy for being free. As Jordan Cohn states, the slaves developed songs, calling him "father Abraham" because he liberated them. At the same time, President Lincoln joined the songs, and he developed a partisan, cultural and social implication to America through the music.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, after many years the African Americans continue to look back and recall the emancipation proclamation. They do not consider it as getting freedom from their slaveholder or the union army, but Lincoln's act concerning slavery freed them.

African Americans fought to get their independence by running away from their slaveholder. However, the proclamation freed them, but they have not attained equality until now. Aisha Mathews states that African Americans still remember the unjust incidences that happened in the past and take it as a means of communication and an ointment for spiritual degradation, which is intended to concentrate on a better future that is full of equality.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Cohn, Jordan. "Abraham Lincoln and the Music of the Civil War." *New Errands: The Undergraduate Journal of American Studies* (2019).

<sup>32</sup> Mathews, Aisha. "Looking Back is Moving Forward: The Legacy of Negro Spirituals in the Civil Rights Movement."

Similarly, Didier Kombieni and Imorou Nassourou claimed that it is the Black's and Whites' responsibility to ensure they live together because the previous masters and slaves are now co-citizens.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, it was the responsibility of the citizens to ensure there is equality in services and just in the system.

By December 1863, Lincoln stated that there was no adverse emancipation proclamation because more than one hundred thousand African Americans had served in the Union military.<sup>34</sup> Also, the confederacy appeared to deteriorate and Lincoln projected a compassionate peace relation. For example, Kentucky had nearly sixty-five thousand slaves under their slaveholders. By 1865 the emancipation proclamation had already liberated more than two hundred thousand slaves, although many others enslaved during the assassination of Lincoln.<sup>35</sup> Also, states that had freed slaves implemented slave codes that reduced their rights.

In summation, the signing of the emancipation proclamation was vital in the history of civil war and the United States in general. Although President Abraham Lincoln did not have the intentions of freeing the African Americans, he aimed to liberate the American nation from the curse of slavery. Moreover, through emancipation, Lincoln wanted the declaration of independence to be a reality in the country, despite the immense pressures encountered from individuals, military, abolitionists and commanders that requested liberation. Nevertheless, if the

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<sup>33</sup> KOMBIENI, Didier, and Nassourou IMOROU. "AFRICAN AMERICANS' RESPONSIBILITY IN THE USA DEFERRED DREAM OF FULL INTEGRATION A CENTURY AFTER EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION: A DISCURSIVE REVISITATION OF JAMES BALDWIN'S THE FIRE NEXT TIME (1963)." (2018).

<sup>34</sup> Cummings, Judy Dodge. *The Emancipation Proclamation*. ABDO, 2016.

<sup>35</sup> Krishnan, S. "A WAR FOR FREEDOM: SLAVERY AND THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION."

president could not have signed the emancipation proclamation, then the effects of slavery yearning for freedom and civil war could be immense. There was increased tension in the nation, with Europe supporting the confederate states and soldiers supporting emancipation. Lincoln had to sign the emancipation proclamation regardless of the opponents to save the union and benefit those who disliked slavery. The documents recap all the actual variations originating from the activities of individuals and the sanction of constitutional power. The slaves played a key role in adding pressure to the administration to work on slavery, which made the president react by the emancipation Proclamation.

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