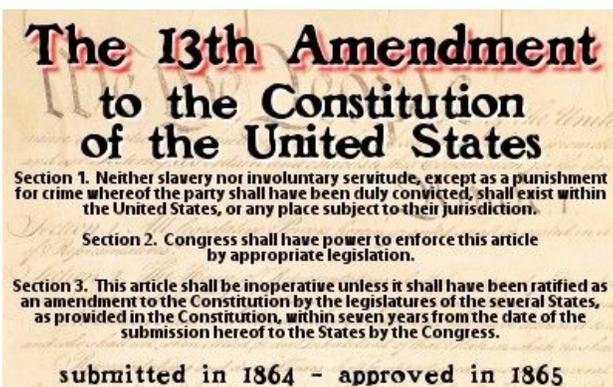


On December 13, 1863, US Representative James M. Ashley (R-OH) introduced a constitutional amendment in the House. Senator John Brooks Henderson (R-MI) introduced a similar anti-slavery amendment in the Senate on January 11, 1864.

The Republican-controlled Senate overwhelmingly approved the amendment barely three months later, when every Republican and two Democrats voted for it. One Democrat “yes” vote came from Oregon Senator James Nesmith.

The Thirteenth Amendment had a harder time in the Democrat-controlled House of Representatives. It took two votes before it passed by a narrow margin. Every Republican voted in favor of it along with 14 Democrats. The great majority of Democrat representatives voted against the amendment to outlaw slavery. The state legislatures quickly took up the ratification process. Slavery in the United States was completely and permanently abolished on December 6, 1865 when Georgia became the 27th state to ratify, thus meeting the constitutional number to amend the US Constitution. The 3.5 Million slaves in a total US population of 31.5 Million became freedmen and freedwomen. Two days later, Oregon ratified the Thirteenth Amendment.



The Thirteenth Amendment was the first amendment to the US Constitution in 61 years (since 1804). To this day, it can be argued that it rivals only the Bill of Rights in importance to Americans, American society and the nation.

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THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION, JUNETEENTH AND THE THIRTEENTH AMENDMENT

Abraham Lincoln, elected in 1860, was the first president of the newly-formed Republican Party. The Republican Party was created in 1854 from an anti-slavery coalition of the Whig Party, the Free-Soiler Party and American Party (AKA Know-Nothings). The new party argued that free market labor was superior to slavery and was the very foundation of civic virtue and true Republicanism.

As the Civil War raged on, President Lincoln offered the Confederate States a chance to surrender. He issued a preliminary draft of the Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, 1862, a year & a half after the war began. It stipulated, if the Southern states did not cease their rebellion by January 1, 1863, the proclamation would go into effect.

Hearing nothing from the Confederacy, President Lincoln issued his proclamation on January 1, 1863 which declared “that all persons held as slaves” within the rebellious states “are, and henceforward shall be free.”



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

Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation was 719 hand-written words. The most significant part reads as follows:

And by virtue of the power, and for the purpose aforesaid, 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 that the Executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons.

And I hereby enjoin upon the people so declared to be free to abstain from all violence, unless in necessary self-defence; and I recommend to them that, in all cases when allowed, they labor faithfully for reasonable wages.

And I further declare and make known, that such persons of suitable condition, will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service.

And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God.

The Emancipation Proclamation applied only to the 11 states that had seceded from the United States, leaving slavery untouched in the four slave states (AKA Border States) that remained loyal to the United States: Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri.



Slave and Confederate States at the time of the Civil War.

Lack of communication between Northerners and Southerners, combined with the fact that most slaves couldn't read, kept most of them ignorant until 30 months after Lincoln freed them. Moreover, slave-owners schemed to prevent their slaves from learning of their freedom.

As word of the Emancipation Proclamation slowly spread through other Confederate states, mainly by Union soldiers, Texas became a safe harbor for slavery. During the war many slave owners moved into the Lone Star State where there were few Union troops to tell the slaves that they had been freed.

Despite the proclamation that had given them their freedom on paper January 1, 1863, in reality many of these men & women remained enslaved until June 19, 1865 when they first learned they had been freed.

The words of freedom came when US General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, Texas and read General Orders No. 3:

"The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property between former masters and slaves, and the connection heretofore existing between them becomes that between employer and hired labor. The freedmen are advised to remain quietly at their present homes and work for wages. They are informed that they will not be allowed to collect at military posts and that they will not be supported in idleness either there or elsewhere."

Celebrations broke out immediately among the newly freed 250,000 people in Texas, and Juneteenth was born!

In 1866 freedmen in Texas organized the first of what became an annual celebration of "Jubilee Day." Many descendants of slaves still celebrate the date, calling it "Juneteenth." Forty-seven states now recognize this day in some fashion, including Oregon, whose 2001 resolution reads as follows:

"Be It Resolved by the Legislative Assembly of the State of Oregon: That we, the members of the Seventy-first Legislative Assembly, do hereby declare Juneteenth, June 19 of each year, to be a day of celebration statewide of the dignity and freedom of all citizens."

