

I feel entirely satisfied with the treatment I have received on my trial. Considering all the circumstances, it has been more generous than I expected. But I feel no consciousness of guilt. I have stated from the first what was my intention, and what was not. I never had any design against the life of any person, nor any disposition to commit treason, or excite slaves to rebel, or make any general insurrection. I never encouraged any man to do so, but always discouraged any idea of that kind.

Let me say, also, a word in regard to the statements made by some of those connected with me. I hear it has been stated by some of them that I have induced them to join me. But the contrary is true. I do not say this to injure them but as regretting their weakness. There is not one of them but joined me of his own accord, and the greater part of them at their own expense. A number of them I never saw, and never had a word of conversation with, till the day they came to me; and that was for the purpose I have stated.

Now I have done.

#### QUESTIONS FOR READING AND DISCUSSION

1. Brown asserts that he never intended to "excite slaves to rebel, or make any general insurrection." What, then, was the purpose of the raid on Harpers Ferry?
2. Why did Brown believe he was "right"? Why did he "feel no consciousness of guilt"? Could he have used the same arguments to defend his actions at Pottawatomie?
3. How do you reconcile the John Brown who delivered this last speech with the ruthless killer at Pottawatomie? What did Townsley think about the Pottawatomie Massacre?
4. To what extent did the Constitution influence Brown's actions or attitudes? What did he believe were the principal consequences of his actions?

#### COMPARATIVE QUESTIONS

1. How did Abraham Lincoln's view of the Constitution's position on slavery differ from Frederick Douglass's? In what ways did Lincoln's and Douglass's views differ from Jefferson Davis's?
2. What might Granville Blanks and John Brown have thought about the constitutional interpretations of Lincoln, Douglass, and Davis? Judging from the documents in this chapter, how would Lincoln, Douglass, and Davis have reacted to Blanks's and Brown's actions?
3. How did each of these individuals define the political problem posed by slavery? What was at stake for these individuals and the people they represented in the debate over slavery?
4. To what extent were racial attitudes and assumptions important in these constitutional arguments? To what extent was the meaning of white racial identity at stake? Why?

# THE CRUCIBLE OF WAR

## 1861-1865

The American Civil War began with the dissolution of the Union. The Confederacy seceded from the Union and fought to maintain its independence. The North went to war to defeat the Confederacy and preserve the Union. Before long, the war confronted most Americans with unprecedented, unexpected, and often painful experiences. In the crucible of conflict, Union war aims shifted toward freedom, slaves fought in Yankee blue against their old masters, white Northerners rioted against the draft and black Americans, Union troops struck the hard hand of war against Confederate civilians, and hundreds of thousands of men became casualties, as the following documents illustrate.

### DOCUMENT 15-1

#### *President Lincoln's War Aims*

*Abraham Lincoln became president pledging to prohibit the extension of slavery to new territories and to do nothing about slavery in the states where it already existed. Within weeks, the nation plunged into war. Antislavery activists pressured Lincoln to make freedom a war aim. In 1862, when fellow Republican Horace Greeley, the editor of the New York Tribune, criticized Lincoln's reluctance to embrace emancipation, Lincoln defended his policy in a public letter, the first selection that follows. Less than five months later, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, the second selection. Later in 1863, after the ferocious battle at Gettysburg, Lincoln delivered his famous address at the dedication of the military cemetery. The Gettysburg Address, the third selection, infused the war to save the Union with universal significance.*

#### *Letter to Horace Greeley, August 22, 1862*

Executive Mansion,  
Washington, August 22, 1862.  
Hon. Horace Greeley

Dear Sir

I have just read yours of the 19th. addressed to myself through the New-York Tribune. . . . If there be perceptible in it an impatient and dictatorial tone, I waive it in deference to an old friend, whose heart I have always supposed to be right.

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Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 5: 388-89; 6: 28-30; 7: 22-23.

As to the policy I "seem to be pursuing" as you say, I have not meant to leave any one in doubt.

I would save the Union. I would save it the shortest way under the Constitution. The sooner the national authority can be restored; the nearer the Union will be "the Union as it was." If there be those who would not save the Union, unless they could at the same time *save* slavery, I do not agree with them. If there be those who would not save the Union unless they could at the same time *destroy* slavery, I do not agree with them. My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is *not* either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing *any* slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union. I shall do *less* whenever I shall believe what I am doing hurts the cause, and I shall do *more* whenever I shall believe doing more will help the cause. I shall try to correct errors when shown to be errors; and I shall adopt new views so fast as they shall appear to be true views.

I have here stated my purpose according to my view of official duty; and I intend no modification of my oft-expressed personal wish that all men every where could be free.

### ***The Emancipation Proclamation, January 1, 1863***

I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, by virtue of the power in me vested as Commander-in-Chief, of the Army and Navy of the United States in time of actual armed rebellion against authority and government of the United States, and as a fit and necessary war measure for suppressing said rebellion, do, on this first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty three, and in accordance with my purpose so to do publicly proclaimed for the full period of one hundred days . . . order and designate as the States and parts of States wherein the people thereof respectively, are this day in rebellion against the United States, the following, to wit:

Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, (except the Parishes of St. Bernard, Plaquemines, Jefferson, St. Johns, St. Charles, St. James, Ascension, Assumption, Terrebonne, Lafourche, St. Mary, St. Martin, and Orleans, including the City of New-Orleans) Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South-Carolina, North-Carolina, and Virginia, (except the fortyeight counties designated as West Virginia, and also the counties of Berkeley, Accomac, Northampton, Elizabeth-City, York, Princess Ann, and Norfolk, including the cities of Norfolk & Portsmouth); and which excepted parts are, for the present, left precisely as if this proclamation were not issued.

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.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the City of Washington, this first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty three, and of the Independence of the United States of America the eighty-seventh.

### ***The Gettysburg Address, November 19, 1863***

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate — we can not consecrate — we can not hallow — this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us — that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion — that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain — that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom — and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

#### **QUESTIONS FOR READING AND DISCUSSION**

1. In his letter to Greeley, how far did Lincoln say he was willing to go to end slavery? What was his paramount goal? What was the significance of his distinction between his "official duty" and his "personal wish"?
2. To what extent were Lincoln's war aims altered by the Emancipation Proclamation? Why did he specify that the proclamation was "a fit and necessary war measure"? Why did he name specific states, counties, parishes, and cities?
3. In the Gettysburg Address, what did Lincoln say was at stake in the war? What meanings did the address associate with the Union? How might Lincoln's audience have shaped his message? Who was his audience, both locally and throughout the nation?
4. How did Lincoln's views toward slavery and the Union evolve during the war, judging from these documents?