

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Statement on the 160th Anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation
January 1, 2023

On New Year's Day, 160 years ago today, President Abraham Lincoln changed America's destiny forever. We were at the height of a raging Civil War, "a house divided" along the dangerous fault line of slavery. During the one hundred days after the battle at Antietam, where more American soldiers were lost in a single day than in any other war, President Lincoln engaged in months of cautious deliberation. His duty, he felt, was to do more than what he personally believed was morally right, but to represent the will of a fractured people.

On January 1, 1863, President Lincoln finally issued the Emancipation Proclamation, ending slavery in States that rebelled against the Union, but preserving the institution in States that remained within the Union. It was not a perfect solution, but it began the active pursuit of perfection, the quest that persists to this day to realize the full promise of democracy in America. With the stroke of a pen, President Lincoln aligned the future of our Nation with the challenge of our world, to end humanity's war against itself, to recognize there is more that unites us than could ever divide us, and to finally reconcile ourselves with one another in peace.

The Emancipation Proclamation became an inspiration to thousands of Americans who celebrated all across the Nation that New Year's Day long into the night. Afterwards, every Union victory became a greater sign that justice could conquer injustice, that freedom would triumph over bondage, and that the battle cry of our Nation was freedom and justice for all.

On this New Year's Day, let us add our voices to those of the ages, to celebrate the unity that is the sacred mission of our Nation. Let us rejoice that freedom is our goal, and let us set aside our differences, break through bitter and divisive partisanship, our finger pointing and blame, and rise up to meet our great calling as a nation. Let us do all we can in 2023 to create "a new birth of freedom" in the United States and ensure that "government of the people, by the people and for the people, shall not perish," but will shine like a sun, a beacon to all people, demonstrating that from the many our great Nation can become one.

Categories: Statements by the President : Emancipation Proclamation, 160th anniversary.

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