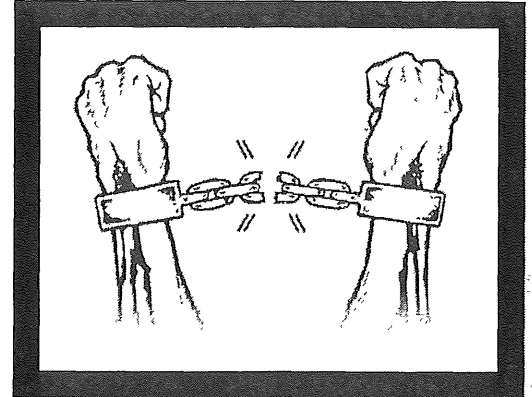


Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address and the 13th Amendment to the Constitution

Background The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 was just the beginning of the process that would eventually ban slavery in the United States. It was the ratification by the states of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution on December 6, 1865 that abolished involuntary servitude in the United States and its territories. Eight months earlier, on April 10, 1865, President Lincoln had given his second Inaugural Address in which he laid out, in stark detail, the cost of slavery to the United States.



Directions: Read the Thirteenth Amendment and the excerpt from Lincoln's second Inaugural Address below. Then answer the questions that follow.

AMENDMENT XIII

Section 1. 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.

Section 2. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

—Passed by Congress January 31, 1865. Ratified December 6, 1865.

One eighth of the whole population were colored slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but localized in the Southern part of it. These slaves constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was somehow, the cause of the war. To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union, even by war; while the government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement of it. Neither party expected for the war, the magnitude, or the duration, which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not that we will be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. Woe unto the world because of offenses! For it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh! If we shall suppose that American Slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South, this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a Living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether.

—Abraham Lincoln. Second Inaugural Address. April 10. 1865

Critical Thinking

1. Why is Section 2 an important part of the Thirteenth Amendment?
2. Who are the "insurgents who would rend the Union"?
3. What did Lincoln mean when he said, "It may seem strange that any men should dare ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces"?
4. What does Lincoln find contradictory in the fact that both the Union and the Confederacy read the same Bible and pray to the same God?
5. To what was Lincoln referring when he noted that "Neither [side] anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease"?