

Talking Points: Analyzing Civil War Documents

- The Civil War generated some of the most memorable documents in American history
- Throughout the war, newspapers, political cartoons, stamps, and popular culture such as songs revealed public opinion of leaders, or attempted to convey diverse feelings about the war experience.
- The Gettysburg Address was delivered after the Battle of Gettysburg had affected 50,000 lives, dead or wounded, in response to town residents' proposal to create a national cemetery on the battlefield. On November 19, 1863, Lincoln delivered his now famous two-minute speech, following a two hour oration by honored speaker, Edward Everett. Lincoln was only to formally dedicate the cemetery; his speech would be considered of no great importance at the time. Indeed, reviews of his speech varied from critical to laudatory
- Lincoln's Gettysburg Address emphasized the following themes: founding fathers' ideas of equality of all men; how the Civil War was a test of the legacy of the foundational ideals of this nation; the sacrifices made by those fighting the war regardless of their goals; and the responsibility of the living to preserve freedom and thus give honor to the dead.
- The Emancipation Proclamation was first issued in a preliminary form after Lee's failed invasion of northern soil at Antietam in September of 1862. Although the document was intended to free only slaves living in states under rebellion, this would be a stepping stone in the abolition of slavery in the United States. Lincoln took a huge political risk in a time of Union defeats and opposition from Democrats. Lincoln's proclamation was based on at least two major factors: slave labor supplied the Confederacy with the means to fight the war. Additionally, emancipation would deter Great Britain or France from allying with the Confederacy because of their own distaste for slavery, a system Southern victory would uphold indefinitely.
- The Emancipation Proclamation was issued on January 1, 1863. Thousands of "contraband" or emancipated slaves joined the Union war effort, especially following Union troops as areas of the South were conquered. This measure would contribute largely to the more than 160,000 black men who served in the Union army.
- Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address- March 1864- states that American slavery is an offense for which "this terrible war" was punishment. Clear agenda of Union becomes the eradication of slavery. Lincoln also projects spirit of reconciliation toward Confederacy- "With malice toward none..". This document is indicative of the moderate plan of Reconstruction Lincoln intends to implement.

- Surrender of Lee to Grant- Lee finally wrote to Jefferson Davis, explaining why surrender was imminent. Grant wrote letters to his superiors as it appeared that he was closing in on Lee's troops in March 1865.