



**The Promise of Freedom: The
Emancipation Proclamation**

September 23, 2012 - February 4, 2013

Commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, this exhibition explored the quintessential ideals that have defined America. Key historical documents from private collectors included Lincoln's signed copy of the Emancipation Proclamation, a signed Thirteenth Amendment, and historic broadsides and political cartoons that revealed Lincoln's struggles with the issue of slavery and the Union. This was the only exhibition in New England that focused on this anniversary, placing the Emancipation Proclamation at the center of understanding American history from the Civil War to Civil Rights and today.

This document contains graphics and text excerpts from the exhibition.

From its beginnings as a nation, the United States was based on both the promise of freedom and the reality of slavery. Slavery had existed in all of the 13 original states, but had become crucial to the economy of the southern states. The Constitution accepted and protected slavery, and the country's new leaders were generally sympathetic to slavery. Ten of our first fifteen presidents had been slaveowners.

"I TREMBLE FOR MY COUNTRY WHEN I REFLECT
THAT GOD IS JUST: THAT HIS JUSTICE CANNOT
SLEEP FOREVER."

— THOMAS JEFFERSON, 1781

As the nation grew, controversy arose over the expansion of slavery into new areas. Growing numbers of northern whites feared that expanding slavery would limit the opportunities available to free men. A small but effective anti-slavery movement raised a strong voice against the expansion of slavery, and even called for its immediate end, or abolition. On the other side, southern whites believed that slavery needed to expand in order for their economy to flourish, and feared losing influence in national government. Slavery was deeply intertwined with the national economy: the products generated by enslaved labor accounted for 80% of all American exports.

A series of compromises kept the political peace in the nation but by the 1850s - with the Fugitive Slave Act, the Dred Scott decision, and John Brown's attack on Harper's Ferry - this peace could no longer be sustained. After Abraham Lincoln was elected in 1860, southern states started to withdraw from the Union. The Confederate attack on Fort Sumter in April 1861 marked the beginning of the Civil War.

The Emancipation Proclamation began a new phase in the struggle to fulfill America's promise of freedom. In the years following the Civil War, the federal government put its weight behind efforts to secure equality, passing the 14th and 15th Amendments, which provided for citizenship, civil rights, and the right to vote. But federal intervention soon faded, and a system of white supremacy emerged which limited the freedom that African-Americans had gained. As scholar W.E.B. DuBois wrote, "the slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery."

"LIBERTY HAS BEEN WON. THE BATTLE FOR
EQUALITY IS STILL PENDING."

— CHARLES SUMNER
EULOGY FOR LINCOLN, 1865

A hundred years after the Proclamation, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stood before thousands of people gathered at the Lincoln Memorial and referred to the Proclamation as both a "beacon light of hope" and an unfulfilled promise. In 1964, as he worked to enforce new civil rights legislation, Attorney General Robert Kennedy purchased a copy of the Proclamation and hung it on the wall of his home. In 2010, President Barack Obama hung a copy in the Oval Office, next to a bust of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Despite its limitations, the Emancipation Proclamation's significance in the struggle for freedom in the United States is indisputable. During its 150th anniversary, it is fitting that we should rediscover and celebrate that "beacon light of hope," while focusing on the work that remains to be done to fully realize the promise of freedom.

Bondage Among Us- Slavery in Connecticut.

At the time of the American Revolution, Connecticut had more slaves than any colony in New England - over 5,000. The town of Fairfield had one of the highest percentage of slaves in Connecticut, with one in seven households owning slaves. Most of these slaveholders owned one or two slaves. They included the most prominent members of the community; half of all ministers, lawyers, and public officials in Connecticut owned slaves, as well as a third of all doctors.

Ownership of slaves was highest in cities and towns like Fairfield, New London, New Haven, and Hartford, where wealthy families used slaves as servants, laborers, or artisans. Since Connecticut farmers did not grow crops like cotton or rice that required large numbers of workers, plantation-style slavery did not develop here as it did in the south.

“altho our Skins are different in Colour, from those who we serve, yet Reason & Revelation join to declare, that we are the Creatures of that God who made of one Blood, and Kindred, all the Nations of the Earth;[...] we have Endeavoured rightly to understand, what is our Right, and what is our Duty, and can never be convinced, that we were made to be Slaves.”

— excerpt, petition from Fairfield slaves Prime and Prince

Connecticut had a strict “slave code” during the 1700s to regulate the behavior of enslaved people. Slaves were to be off the streets by 9 at night; any slave caught wandering about without a pass could be arrested as a runaway, and whipped. It was illegal to help a slave run away, and someone suspected of being a runaway could be arrested and held in prison without a warrant. Slaves could not gather in groups larger than three without a white person, and could not sell goods without a permit.

Connecticut was the last state in New England to free its slaves after the American Revolution. After rejecting several proposals, the legislature provided for gradual emancipation in the revised state statutes adopted in 1784. This measure freed no living slaves, but mandated that every slave born after March 1st, 1784 would be freed at age 25. Connecticut fully abolished slavery outright in 1848, by which time there were only a small number of slaves left in the state.

“THE GOVERNMENT [THE FRAMERS OF THE CONSTITUTION] DEvised WAS DEFECTIVE FROM THE START, REQUIRING SEVERAL AMENDMENTS, A CIVIL WAR AND MOMENTOUS SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION TO ATTAIN THE SYSTEM OF CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT, AND ITS RESPECT FOR THE INDIVIDUAL FREEDOMS AND HUMAN RIGHTS, WE HOLD AS FUNDAMENTAL TODAY.”

—SUPREME COURT JUSTICE THURGOOD MARSHALL, 1987

This **Connecticut newspaper** printed the proposed U.S. Constitution during debates over its ratification in 1788, alongside a runaway slave advertisement. The Constitution included a number of protections for the institution of slavery, including a provision for returning fugitive slaves, the three-fifths clause giving more representation to states with large slave populations, and a measure prohibiting Congress from immediately outlawing the slave trade.

Southington, May 17.
TEN DOLLARS REWARD.
RANAWAY from the subscribers in Fairfield, on the 6th inst. two negro BOYS, one named Toney, he was a little lame in his right knee, aged 22 years, about five feet 4 or 5 inches high, took with him one mix'd coloured coatee and trowsers of the same; one long black coat and pantaloons of the same; one pair of striped linen trowsers, and one napt hat; one light drab furtout all homespun cloth — The other named Sampson about 18 years of age, about 5 feet 6 inches high, carried away with him a light mix'd great coat; one black short jacket most new, and one old one; one pair blue and white striped trowsers, and one pair tow trowsers; one pair thin shoes, and one pair of thick ones; one old napt hat; shews the white of his eyes when spoken to, and looks roguish. All persons are forbid harbouring or employing said boys on penalty of the law. Whoever will take up and secure said boys shall receive the above reward and all necessary charges paid by the subscribers
EBENEZER BANKS.
WILLIAM SHERWOOD, Jun.
Fairfield, (Conn.) May 17. 12

Winchester, May 10th, 1793
RUN-away from the subscriber on the 10th inst. a Negro man, named Hamon, more than midling for size, light complexion, one thumb off at the middle joint, about twenty-eight years of age; had on when he went away, a blue coat, a light brown jacket, and woollen trowsers, had with him a fiddle. Whoever will take up said Negro, and give me notice, or deliver him to me, shall receive Ten Dollars reward and all necessary charges paid by me,
HENRY TOMLINSON.
Huntington, Fairfield County, and State of Connecticut, May 13, 1793.

I know all men by these presence
 That Joseph Hanford of Fairfield in the County
 of Fairfield in the Colony of Connecticut for the
 Consideration of Thirty five Pounds Lawfull
 Money Received to my full Satisfaction do give
 Grant Sell and Convey unto Nathaniel Adams
 of Fairfield in the Colony aforesd a certain
 Negro Boy named Amos aged eight years
 old on their Aboute and If the sd Joseph
 Hanford do Warrant sd Negro Boy to be
 Force and Clear of all Incumberance
 Signed Sealed and Delivered in presence of
 John Hanford
 Abigail Hanford Joseph Hanford


That slavery was a fact of life in Fairfield is reflected in these legal documents which provide for the sale of an 8-year old named Amos, a 6-year old named Gin, and a 12-year old named Nell. Jeffrey was first sold at the age of 16, and again at 23. He was born too soon to be affected by the law that freed slaves born after March 1784, but his owner did emancipate him in 1812, when Jeffrey was 34 years old.



The leading slaveholders

Elijah Mason, Sr., of Lebanon	28
Phillip Mortimer, Esq., of Middletown	11
Robert Dixon of Voluntown	11
James Davenport of Norwalk-Stamford	10
Timothy Hale of Glastonbury	10
John Hendrick of Windsor	9
Hon. Eliphalet Dyer of Windham	8
Elihu Hall of Wallingford	8
Nathan Bulkeley of Fairfield	8
David Bush of Greenwich	8
Daniel Shelton of Huntington	8
Rufus Dutcher of Litchfield	7
Hezekiah Bradley of Fairfield	7
Mary Silliman of Fairfield	7
Moses Husted, Jr., of Greenwich	7
Ebenezer Taylor of Newtown	7
Issac Gorham of Redding	7



A sepia-toned photograph of a dilapidated wooden structure, identified as slave quarters, situated in a rural setting with trees and a grassy field. The structure is made of weathered wood and has a gabled roof. A large tree is on the left, and a wooden bench is in the foreground on the right.

Gold Selleck Silliman, who played an important role in Revolutionary Connecticut, was one of Fairfield's larger slaveowners. Most Connecticut slaves lived in their owner's house, often sleeping in an attic or kitchen, rather than in separate quarters like these.

Image of slave quarters at Silliman house,
Fairfield, c. 1900
Fairfield Museum collection

Although Lincoln was personally opposed to slavery, he did not act against it during the first 15 months of the Civil War for two reasons: he did not believe he had the legal authority to do so, and he feared that attacking slavery would send the slaveholding border states into the arms of the Confederacy. "I hope to have God on my side," he said, "but I must have Kentucky." Lincoln hoped to persuade these slaveholding states to end slavery themselves, with the promise of federal compensation. Under the Constitution, the states - not the federal government - had the power to determine questions like slavery.

"NO HUMAN POWER CAN SUBDUE THIS REBELLION WITHOUT USING THE EMANCIPATION LEVER AS I HAVE DONE."

—LINCOLN, 1864

The slaves themselves helped to force the issue. From the moment the war began, thousands fled to Union lines seeking their own freedom. Dubbed "contrabands" (enemy property seized during war), these runaway slaves compelled the administration to take action. In July 1862, Congress passed a Confiscation Act stating that slaves would not be returned to their masters. Instead, they were put to work in helping Union forces.

That same month, Lincoln decided to issue an emancipation proclamation. He did so because the war was dragging and the Union needed to strike against the rebellion. He had concluded that as commander-in-chief he could legitimately act against slavery in order to win the war, and that public opinion would support it. The Confederacy's use of slave labor strengthened its ability to wage war, and it was time to deprive the enemy of this resource. He did so also because he came to realize that the border slave states would not initiate action against slavery—that slavery would have to fall first in the Confederacy. And he did so because, as he would write two years later, "...if slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong."

Although he drafted the proclamation in July, he delayed issuing it until a Union military victory, so that it would not seem like an act of desperation. He issued a preliminary proclamation on September 22, 1862, and the final Emancipation Proclamation a hundred days later, on January 1, 1863. Some had feared that the president might change his mind, but he did not retreat. Indeed, he had earlier told a group of visiting Kentuckians "he would rather die than take back a word of the Proclamation of Freedom."

To arms to arms! Black men join the fight.

Making former slaves into soldiers was almost as significant as emancipation itself, for serving in the military provided a path to citizenship. Lincoln became an avid supporter of black military service; by war's end, blacks made up nearly 10% of Union forces.

Black soldiers participated in the war at great risk to their lives, for the Confederate government threatened to execute or sell into slavery any of them they captured. Nevertheless, black soldiers served with great courage and won the respect of others. One white soldier noted that "they have won the praises of all and the rebels are as afraid of them as they would be of many tigers."

Lincoln became a strong advocate of black soldiers. Refusing to retract emancipation, he wrote that "With silent tongue, and clenched teeth, and steady eye, and well-poised bayonet," black men were helping to win the war.

"Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters 'U.S.,' ... and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pockets, and there is no power on earth or under the earth which can deny that he has earned the right of citizenship in the United States."

—Frederick Douglass

But making emancipation last beyond the war would require a constitutional amendment. Fearing that his Proclamation could be overturned, especially if he was not re-elected in 1864, Lincoln worked behind the scenes to secure Congressional approval for outlawing slavery throughout the United States. He was assassinated before the 13th Amendment was ratified in December 1865.

"WE HOLD THESE TRUTHS TO BE SELF-EVIDENT: THAT ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL; THAT THEY ARE ENDOWED BY THEIR CREATOR WITH CERTAIN UNALIENABLE RIGHTS; THAT AMONG THESE ARE LIFE, LIBERTY AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS....."

—DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

The Declaration's famous statement that "**all men are created equal**" came to be seen as a promise of equality and freedom.

Abraham Lincoln frequently talked about the Declaration, insisting that the rights of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" must apply to all. During and after the Civil War, freed African-Americans repeatedly pointed to the Declaration in arguing for equality. One observer noted in 1868, "The colored people had read the Declaration until it had become part of their natures."

Standing Firm.

Praise and Protest.

Hours before midnight on December 31, 1862, crowds gathered in churches and halls, homes and slave quarters, awaiting the arrival of the day of Jubilee. Through the night, people sang, spoke, and prayed. “Battles are fought now for justice,” declared one abolitionist. A runaway slave cried “Tomorrow my child is to be sold nevermore.”

a “great moral landmark...a pillar of fire which will yet guide other nations out of the night of their bondage.”

—*Washington Chronicle*

Lincoln had been concerned about the reactions of soldiers to the Proclamation, as rumors spread that the army would mutiny. Gen. McClellan had opposed it, fearing it would lead to slave revolts. But countless soldiers embraced the decree as a means of punishing the Confederacy. A private with the 23rd Iowa spoke for many when he declared, “the best thing that has been done since the war broke out is the Emancipation Proclamation.”

American diplomats also praised the edict, reporting that foreign nations would be reluctant to meddle in the war, now that it had become a war against slavery. From London, correspondent Henry Adams rejoiced: “The Emancipation Proclamation has done more for us here than all our former victories and all our diplomacy.”

“The most startling political crime, the most stupid political blunder, yet known in American history.”

—*Richmond Inquirer*

Not everyone was pleased. The governor of Massachusetts called it “a poor document, but a mighty act.” Northern opponents of the administration joined Confederates in denouncing Lincoln as a tyrant and dictator and expressed the fear that the Proclamation would cause slaves to rise up and massacre whites, “till their hands are smeared and their appetites glutted with blood.” Democrats ran against the Proclamation in the 1862 elections and picked up 28 seats in Congress.

“It is the beginning of the end of the rebellion; the beginning of the new life of the nation. God bless Abraham Lincoln.”

—*New York Tribune*

While some feared that the Emancipation Proclamation would lead to violent slave uprisings, it was whites who turned to violence after the Proclamation was issued. The worst riots in American history broke out in New York City in the summer of 1863 in opposition to the military draft. Angry at being forced to fight for slaves’ emancipation, rioters beat black soldiers and civilians, burned an orphanage, and attacked black neighborhoods. Fairfield’s Samuel Morehouse who was in New York wrote to his wife describing a “sky aglow” with flames, fire bells slowly tolling, and “furious yells of the mob who in parties of 2, 3, or more hundred went singing through the streets.” He concluded, “I saw many things during Monday & Tuesday I hope never to see again.”

A “second Declaration of Independence from slavery, which is certain to awaken more excitement than the first.”

—*Philadelphia Press*

COLONIZATION OR ABOLITION

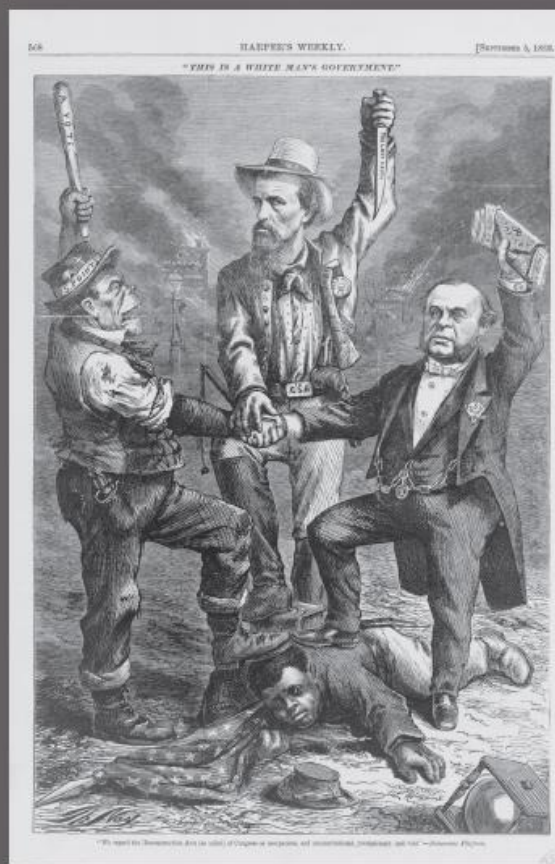
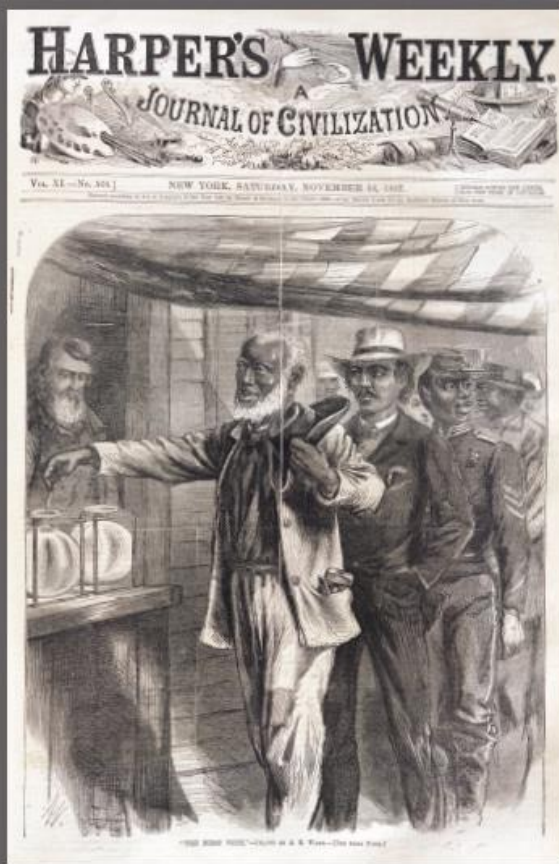
People in Connecticut were active in the national debates about slavery, abolition and emancipation. During the 1800s, several prominent residents of Fairfield were drawn to the colonization movement, which advocated sending freed slaves to settle in Africa. Colonization was embraced by many of the nation’s early leaders, and President Lincoln promoted the idea through much of his career.

Fairfield-born Benjamin Silliman, a prominent Yale professor, said in 1827 that he had considered regard support of the Colonization Society as “private Christian duty, and a public national duty.” Most African-Americans strongly opposed colonization, arguing for the abolition of slavery instead.

Connecticut abolitionists organized the Connecticut Anti-Slavery Society in 1838. Some, like William Wakeman of Wilton, helped escape slaves by providing shelter and safe passage along the “Underground Railroad.” These early abolitionists were often met with violent resistance from their neighbors. When two anti-slavery lecturers were speaking at the Georgetown Baptist Church in 1838, a threatening mob attacked the church. Opponent exploded a keg of gunpowder beneath the pulpit, destroying the interior of the church and blowing off the front of the building.

This drawing, which appeared on the cover of Harper's Weekly on November 16, 1867, celebrates the historic occasion when thousands of Black men were able to vote for the first time. It shows three African-American men - a workman (with tools in his pocket), a businessman, and a soldier - waiting for their turn to vote. Black voters eagerly went to the polls that fall in large numbers, from 70% in Georgia to almost 90% in Virginia. The text accompanying the image praised "the good sense and discretion, and above all modesty, which the freedmen have displayed in the exercise" of their franchise.

A. R. Waud, *The First Vote*,
Harper's Weekly, Nov. 16, 1867
Courtesy of Watkinson Library, Trinity College



Thomas Nast, *This is a White Man's Government*,
Harper's Weekly, September 5, 1868
Courtesy of Watkinson Library, Trinity College

Appearing during the presidential election campaign of 1868, this cartoon conveyed criticism of the Democratic Party's opposition to black rights and Reconstruction measures. The cartoonist used the three standing figures to represent the three wings of the Democratic party: the Irish worker on the left; Nathan Bedford Forrest (representing the Confederate influence) in the center; and on the right, August Belmont (representing the business interests accused of buying votes).

These three Democratic figures are trampling a black Union veteran, holding an American flag and reaching for a ballot box. Nast felt obliged to emphasize the fact that black men had earned the right to vote through their participation in the Union war effort. In having the Democrats trample the American flag, as well as the black man, the artist implies that they are attacking basic American principles and the entire nation, not merely one minority.

The Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, outlawing slavery in the United States, passed the Senate in 1864 but was defeated in the House of Representatives. Following his re-election in 1864, Lincoln pressed behind the scenes for the passage of the amendment, which passed Congress in January 1865. It was the first constitutional amendment in sixty years. Lincoln signed a number of "souvenir" copies demonstrating his approval. He did not live to see the amendment ratified at the end of 1865, but would have been gratified to know that it freed nearly a million slaves still held in bondage. The states of Kentucky and Mississippi did not ratify the amendment until 1976 and 1995, respectively.

Thirteenth Amendment, 1865.
Signed by Abraham Lincoln,
Vice President Hannibal Hamlin,
Speaker of the House Schuyler Colfax as,
and Secretary of the Senate John W. Forney.
Loan: Anonymous lender, courtesy of Seth Kaller, Inc

The Emancipation Proclamation freed tens of thousands of slaves immediately. Hundreds of thousands more would be liberated by advancing Union forces, or by running away to Union lines, and by 1865 America's four million slaves would ultimately gain their freedom.

LIFE AFTER SLAVERY

Slavery was a part of daily life in Fairfield County during the 1700s, and Fairfield had one of the highest slave populations in Connecticut. A 1784 law provided that children born into slavery from that point forward would be free once they reached the age of 25. Connecticut did not fully abolish slavery until 1848, by which time there were only a small number of slaves left in the state.

African-Americans in Connecticut moved gradually from slavery to freedom, building churches and seeking opportunity in the region's growing cities. In Bridgeport, African-Americans purchased property in an area of the South End that came to be known as "Little Liberia." Freed blacks continued to face racial hostility and limited opportunity to participate in the state's economic and public life: they were barred from voting by the state's constitution, and efforts to open up higher education to them met with violent resistance. In the decades that followed, they continued to seek equality as they created a place for themselves in Connecticut.

FAIRFIELDERS AND THE CIVIL WAR

Whatever their views on slavery, Fairfield residents were touched by the war. Many Fairfield men served in the Union army, especially in the CT 17th Regiment, which fought at Chancellorsville and Gettysburg, and the 29th Colored Regiment, which fought in Maryland and Virginia; a number lost their lives in battle or to disease. The town of Fairfield offered a bounty to men who volunteered for the military. On the home front, women's organizations like the Southport Soldiers' Aid Society provided much-needed supplies for soldiers, while church services were devoted to praying for the country's welfare.



Ely Parker, a Seneca chief, served as a key aide and secretary to Gen. Ulysses Grant during the war, and drew up the documents for Lee's surrender at Appomattox. After becoming the first Native American to serve as Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Parker settled in Fairfield in the 1870s.

Photo, Ely Parker in Uniform
Fairfield Museum collection



Edwin Randolph, a former slave, came to Fairfield after the Civil War and worked for Judge Lockwood. He purchased land on Barlow Road and lived with his children and grandchildren in a modest home there, making daily treks to the shore where he fished for clams.