

1809-1865

**ABRAHAM LINCOLN**

*What role did Lincoln play in the abolition of slavery? Can Abraham Lincoln really be called the "Great Emancipator?*

**I/ The presidency of Abraham Lincoln: a period of tension between the election and the Civil War.**

**A) The political context and Lincoln's election.**

**B) The abolition of slavery was initially a purely military measure.**

* Lincoln began his career as a lawyer, then was elected to the House of Representatives.
* In **1860**, he was nominated as the Republican Party's presidential candidate and won the election with just under 40% of the vote.
* His election provoked tensions with the slaveholding states of the South. In his inaugural address, Lincoln stated that he had no intention of abolishing slavery to ease tensions.
* South Carolina and other Southern slave states decide to secede, forming the Confederacy. The Union was dissolved in December **1860**, and the American Civil War began in **1861** when Lincoln took office as President.
* Lincoln's ambivalent position: he thought that slavery was morally, socially, and politically wrong, but did not believe that blacks and whites should have the same social rights.
* The Emancipation Proclamation of September 22, **1862**: threatened to free the slaves as a means of ending the Civil War.
* This measure accelerated the end of the Civil War by weakening the army of the Southern states and causing slaves to flee to the North.
* However, only slaves in Southern states were affected by this measure and it was not intended to be generalized.



**B) After Lincoln: the challenges of racial equality and the continuation of the struggle**

**II/ Emancipation and its consequences: the fight for equality during Lincoln's presidency.**

* Abraham Lincoln was dubbed the "Great Emancipator", but this proclamation did not abolish slavery in the slave states that remained loyal to the Union.
* Radical Republicans put pressure on Lincoln to abolish slavery. Congress passed laws prohibiting the return of fugitives to their masters.
* The Second Confiscation Act of **1862** freed rebellious slaves "forever".
* Lincoln is re-elected in **1864** and the 13th Amendment to the Constitution is adopted in **1865**, definitively abolishing slavery throughout the United States. Four million slaves are freed.
* April 14, **1865** : assassination of A. Lincoln by a Southern sympathizer opposed to the abolition of slavery.
* After Lincoln's death, segregation progresses in the Southern states. *e.g*. "Jim Crow" laws : "separate but equal", rise of groups like the Ku Klux Klan, and Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* declaring segregation constitutional.
* The victory of the fight against slavery was only the beginning of the struggle for *de jure* and *de facto* equality for Americans.

**A) The abolition of slavery : a turning point in American history**