

## Conclusion

### *Emancipation Day, 1863*

As dawn broke across a cloudless sky over the South Carolina Sea Islands, Charlotte Forten, a black Pennsylvania missionary who had come south to teach local freedpeople, set out for Camp Saxton. After a short ride on an old carriage pulled by “a remarkably slow horse,” she boarded the ship *Flora* for the trip up the Beaufort River to Port Royal Island. A band entertained the white and black passengers on the warm winter morning as they steamed toward the headquarters of the First South Carolina Volunteers. By midday, a crowd of thousands – comprising not only teachers like Forten but also Union soldiers, northern ministers, and ex-slaves – had gathered in the largest live-oak grove Forten had ever seen. Located on what had once been the Smith plantation, just a few miles outside of Beaufort, Camp Saxton was, according to Thomas D. Howard, another northern missionary teaching in the Sea Islands, “ideal for the occasion.”<sup>1</sup>

Why had they come? It was the first day of 1863, yes, but more importantly, the day that Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation was scheduled to take effect. It was, in other words, the moment in which Sea Island bondspeople – indeed, nearly all of the more than 3 million slaves who resided in rebellious southern states – were to be officially declared

<sup>1</sup> Harriet Ware, letter, Jan. 1, 1863, in *Letters from Port Royal Written at the Time of the Civil War*, ed. Elizabeth Ware Pearson (Boston: W. B. Clarke, 1906), 128; Charlotte L. Forten Grimké, Journal Three, Jan. 1, 1863, in *The Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimké*, ed. Brenda Stevenson (New York, Oxford University Press, 1988), 428; Ash, *Firebrand of Liberty*, 13; Reminiscences of Thomas Dwight Howard, in “Charles Howard’s Family Domestic History,” 103, #3256-2, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC.

“thenceforward, and forever free.”<sup>2</sup> Lincoln’s proclamation, to be fair, did little to change the lives of the enslaved who labored behind Union lines, at least in the short term. Yet, as many Lincoln critics overlooked then and afterwards, the proclamation also applied to tens of thousands of slaves living in Union-occupied portions of Arkansas, Florida, Mississippi, North Carolina, and the South Carolina Sea Islands. While most – if not all – of these men, women, and children had been liberated over the first two years of the war, the Emancipation Proclamation stamped their newfound status with the presidential imprimatur.<sup>3</sup>

At Camp Saxton, then, the first day of January signaled a definitive end to a barbarous institution that had thrived in the region since the seventeenth century. “When some future Bancroft or Motley writes with philosophic brain and poet’s hand the story of the Great Civil War,” wrote Thomas Wentworth Higginson, “he will find the transition to a new era in our nation’s history to have been fitly marked by one festal day, – that of the announcement of the President’s Proclamation, upon Port-Royal Island, on the first of January, 1863.”<sup>4</sup>

The Transcendentalist colonel presided over the ceremony from his perch on a newly erected platform at the center of a grove. It was a remarkable scene, he recalled a year later: “The moss-hung trees, with their hundred-foot diameter of shade; the eager faces of women and children in the foreground; the many-colored headdresses; the upraised hands; the neat uniforms of the soldiers; the outer row of mounted officers and ladies; and beyond all the blue river, with its swift, free tide.” Such a tableau, unthinkable a few years earlier, suggested both radical change and difficult work ahead. Sitting next to Higginson on the platform were a dozen Union officers, musicians, and dignitaries, mostly white. They stared out

<sup>2</sup> Abraham Lincoln, “Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation,” Sept. 22, 1862, in the *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 5: 434.

<sup>3</sup> While some historians have argued that Lincoln’s proclamation immediately freed tens of thousands of slaves in non-exempt Union-occupied regions like the Sea Islands, James Oakes makes a compelling case that federal legislation and War Department policy had already liberated bondspeople living in those areas. Eric Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 50; Foner, *Fiery Trial*, 243; Louis P. Masur, *Lincoln’s Hundred Days: The Emancipation Proclamation and the War of the Union* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 281; William C. Harris, “After the Emancipation Proclamation: Lincoln’s Role in Ending Slavery,” *North and South* 5 (Dec. 2001): 48; Harris, *Lincoln’s Last Months* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 126; Oakes, *Freedom National*, 129–144, 192–255; James Oakes, e-mail to author, Mar. 5, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> TWH, “Regular and Volunteer Officers,” 356–357.

at a sea of black faces, many of whom were now Union soldiers. These simple arrangements were was a stark reminder that even emancipation celebrations could not escape the racial hierarchy of the day.<sup>5</sup>

The program began just before noon with a short musical selection, a prayer, and then a recitation of the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation – the final version was not sent out until later that day – by a local planter who had freed his slaves a quarter century earlier. On paper, Lincoln’s proclamation may have had, in historian Richard Hofstadter’s famous description, “all the moral grandeur of a bill of lading,” but when read aloud at to the crowd at Camp Saxton – who repeatedly interrupted the recitation with loud cheers – it was plenty powerful.<sup>6</sup>

The real emotional chord that day, however, was struck by the freed-people themselves, when, midway through the program, they broke out in an impromptu rendition of “My country ’tis of thee.” Just as Higginson formally accepted regimental colors – a silk American flag and a regimental banner made of a lightweight wool fabric called bunting – from New York minister Mansfield French, “there suddenly arose, close beside the platform, a strong but rather cracked & elderly male voice, into which two women’s voices immediately blended, singing if by an impulse that can no more be quenched than the morning note of the song sparrow.” Soon hundreds of voices joined in. The singing eventually spread to the white officers and missionaries seated behind Higginson on the platform, before the colonel curtly commanded, “Leave it to them.”<sup>7</sup>

By the end of the song, sobbing men and women erupted in applause. Dr. Seth Rogers, surgeon for the Volunteers, wrote that the freedmen and women “sang it so touchingly that everyone was thrilled beyond

<sup>5</sup> *Frank Leslie’s Newspaper*, Jan. 24, 1863; *Liberator*, Jan. 16, 1863. On emancipation celebrations, see Mitch Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and the Meaning of African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808–1915* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003) and Kathleen Ann Clark, *Defining Moments: African American Commemoration & Political Culture in the South, 1863–1913* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> *New-York Tribune*, Jan. 14, 1863; *New York Times*, Jan. 9, 1863; TWH, Journal, Jan. 1, 1863, in CWJ, 76; Thomas D. Howard to the *Christian Inquirer*, Jan. 2, 1863, in the *Christian Inquirer*, Jan. 17, 1863; Ash, *Firebrand of Liberty*, 22–28; Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (New York: Vintage, 1989), 169. Although Hofstadter used these words to describe the final Emancipation Proclamation, he surely would have applied them to the equally legalistic preliminary proclamation.

<sup>7</sup> Laura M. Towne, *Letters and Diaries of Laura M. Towne, Written from the Sea Islands of South Carolina, 1862–1864*, ed. Rupert S. Holland (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1912), 98; TWH, Journal, Jan. 1, 1863, in CWJ, 76–77; Ware, letter, 130.

measure,” while Charlotte Forten thought “it was a touching and beautiful incident.” Higginson was more effusive. “I never saw anything so electric; it made all other words cheap,” he observed. “Art could not have dreamed of a tribute to the day of jubilee that should be so affecting; history will not believe it.” It was “the key note to the whole day.”<sup>8</sup>

Just one day earlier, Higginson had wondered whether locals even cared about Emancipation Day. “They know that those in this Department are nominally free already,” he noted, “and also they know that this freedom has yet to be established on any firm basis.” The ceremony at Camp Saxton, however, put an end to such doubts. “Just think of it,” Higginson wrote that evening, “the first day they had ever had a country, the first flag they had ever seen which promised anything to their people, – & here while others stood in silence, waiting for my stupid words these simple souls burst out in their lay, as if they were squatting by their own hearths at home.”<sup>9</sup>

The spontaneity of the moment seemed to inspire the New Romantic, who offered lengthy off-the-cuff remarks. “I have for six weeks listened to the songs of these people,” he told the crowd, songs that more often than not evoked “sadness and despair.” Never before had Higginson heard them utter this hopeful hymn. “How could they sing it before today? Was it their country? Was it to them a land of liberty? But now, with this flag unfurled, ‘the day of jubilee has come,’” he proclaimed. Higginson then called the regiment’s color guard, Sergeant Prince Rivers and Corporal Robert Sutton, to the front of the stage. After presenting the Stars and Stripes to Rivers, Higginson reminded his sergeant that it was his solemn duty to defend the flag with his life. “Do you understand?” asked the colonel. Rivers said yes. Next Higginson presented the bunting flag to Sutton and ceded the platform to his men.<sup>10</sup>

Rivers, a freedman whom Higginson compared to Haitian rebel Toussaint Louverture, spoke first. He repeated his pledge that “he would die before surrendering” the flag, adding that “he wanted to show it to all the old masters.” Corporal Sutton focused his remarks on the emancipations that had yet to come. Not a single person here, he told the assembled

<sup>8</sup> *New-York Tribune*, Jan. 14, 1863; Seth Rogers, “War Letters of Dr. Seth Rogers, 1862–3,” *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 43 (Feb. 1910): 340; Grimké, *Journal Three*, Jan. 1, 1863, in the *Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimké*, 430; TWH, *Journal*, Jan. 1, 1863, in *CWJ*, 77, 76.

<sup>9</sup> TWH, *Journal*, Dec. 31, 1862, TWH, *Journal*, Jan. 1, 1863, in *CWJ*, 75, 77.

<sup>10</sup> TWH, quoted in Howard to the *Christian Inquirer*, Jan. 2, 1863, in the *Christian Inquirer*, Jan. 17, 1863; Ware, letter, 130–131 (quotation 131).

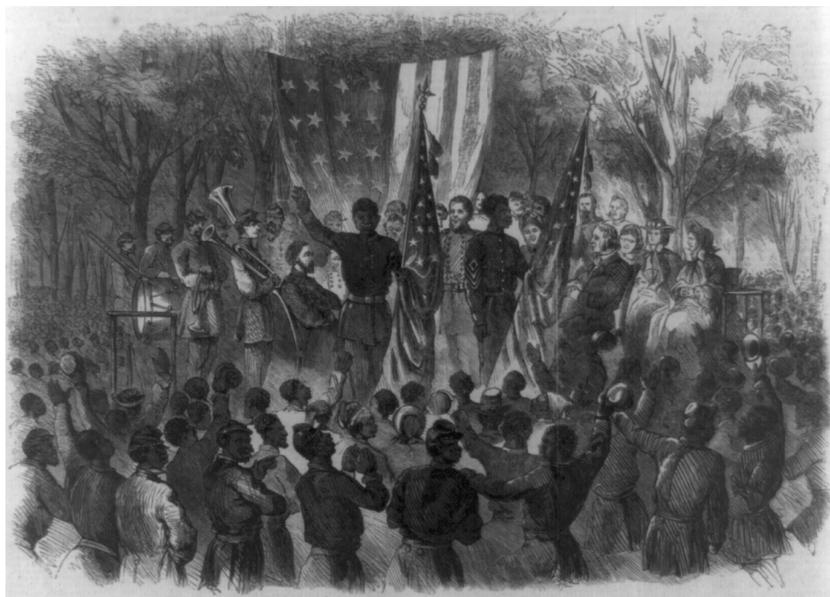


FIGURE C.1. Emancipation Day celebration, Camp Saxton, South Carolina, Jan. 1, 1863. Sergeant Prince Rivers of the First South Carolina Volunteers addresses the enthusiastic crowd.

Source: *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Jan. 24, 1863, p. 276. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-88808.

freedpeople, “but had sister, brother, or some relation among the rebels still.” The ex-slave then insisted that “he could not rest satisfied while so many of their kindred were left in chains,” before urging the Volunteers to “*show their flag to Jefferson Davis in Richmond.*” The audience showered both soldiers with shouts of approval (Figure C.1).<sup>11</sup>

The program continued with another hour’s worth of speeches and songs, before the large crowd retired to crude tables to enjoy a feast of barbecued oxen, hard bread, and molasses-sweetened water. Finally, in a fitting coda to the day’s events, the Volunteers demonstrated their new-found freedom in an expertly executed dress parade, their bright red trousers – which Higginson hated – the only reminder that the former slaves

<sup>11</sup> TWH, Journal, Jan. 13, 1863, in *CWJ*, 88; Mansfield French to S. P. Chase, Jan. 2, [1863], in *The Salmon P. Chase Papers, Volume 3: Correspondence, 1858-March 1863*, ed. John Niven (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1996), 352; *New-York Tribune*, Jan. 14, 1863. The French letter is misdated January 2, 1862.

were any different from the hundreds of thousands of white Americans who wore Union blue.<sup>12</sup>

By four o'clock, the crowd began to make its way home from Camp Saxton. Some left on foot, while others boarded the *Flora*, which headed north toward St. Helenaville, and the *Boston*, which sailed south for Hilton Head. Music filled the air as the black men and women, leaving "their grove of gladness," in Howard's apt phrase, once again broke into song. "The singing," he wrote, "seemed to come from free hearts."<sup>13</sup>

Higginson's New England friends and colleagues, including Garrison, Stowe, and Emerson, also rang in Emancipation Day with song. In their case, however, they marked the occasion indoors, within the elegant confines of the Boston Music Hall. Having once hosted Parker's Twenty-Eighth Congregational Society, the Music Hall, on New Year's Day, 1863, was the site for a Grand Jubilee Concert. The event featured the music of Beethoven, Handel, and Mendelssohn, with all proceeds going to a freedpeople's education fund. Like Higginson, the concert promoters envisioned Emancipation Day as "the complement of the 4th of July, 1776."<sup>14</sup>

Three thousand people turned out for the afternoon performance, which one observer deemed as "brilliant" as its audience. As was the case in South Carolina, the day's most memorable moments were not part of the formal program. First, as the large audience took their seats, concert organizers announced that Emerson would open the proceedings with a poem that he had written for the occasion. John Sullivan Dwight had asked the Transcendentalist to write something for the Music Hall performance a few weeks earlier. Who better to punctuate this confluence of art and reform than the Sage of Concord he thought?<sup>15</sup>

Dwight had a point. Emerson, who years ago had shaken off his reluctance about lending his pen to the cause of the slave, had been thinking a great deal about Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. "Great is the virtue of the Proclamation," he confided in his journal not long after the

<sup>12</sup> *New-York Tribune*, Jan. 14, 1863; *New York Times*, Jan. 9, 1863; TWH, Journal, Jan. 1, 1863, in CWJ, 78; Ware, letter, 133; TWH, *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, 6.

<sup>13</sup> Ash, *Firebrand of Liberty*, 27; Howard to the *Christian Inquirer*, Jan. 2, 1863, in the *Christian Inquirer*, Jan. 17, 1863.

<sup>14</sup> *Liberator*, Dec. 26, 1862; TWH, "Regular and Volunteer Officers," 357; *Liberator*, Jan. 9, 1863.

<sup>15</sup> "Letter from Boston," Jan. 5, 1863, in the *Christian Examiner*, Jan. 17, 1863; Dwight, "The Jubilee Concert," *Dwight's Journal of Music* 22 (Jan. 10, 1863): 326; Gougeon, *Virtue's Hero*, 291; Kenneth W. Cameron, "The First Appearance of Emerson's 'Boston Hymn,'" *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 22 (1st qt. 1961): 97-101.

president first announced the measure in September. "It works when men are sleeping, when the Army goes into winter quarters, when generals are treacherous or imbecile." In November, he published a short essay in the *Atlantic Monthly* that celebrated the proclamation as a once-in-a-century "poetic act." Accordingly, Emerson agreed to write a poem for the Grand Jubilee Concert, though in typical fashion he asked that his name be left off the program in case he did not finish in time.<sup>16</sup>

Emerson surely had in mind his late friend Theodore Parker as he began to read his "Boston Hymn" at the Music Hall. Earlier that day, he had spoken to the Parker Fraternity, which had stopped meeting regularly at the large venue after the popular minister's death.<sup>17</sup> Now, Emerson offered a poem that echoed many of the themes his fellow Transcendentalist had touched on time and again in that very space. Parker, recall, rooted his romantic approach to the problem of slavery in the eternal struggle between the Idea of Freedom and the Slave Power, the superiority of God's higher law, and the progressive course of history. In similar fashion, Emerson's hymn, which opened with God speaking to the audience's Puritan forbearers, posited a world divided between "fishers and choppers and ploughmen," on the one hand, and kings and tyrants, on the other. Like Parker, Emerson suggested that the Lord is on the side of the "wretch and slave," while imploring his listeners to follow God's law, making his angel of freedom "your king." Then, turning his attention more directly the cause of the day, Emerson proclaimed that emancipation was, in fact, divine will. God commands:

To-day unbind the captive  
So only are ye unbound;  
Lift up a people from the dust,  
Trump of their rescue, sound!

Five years after Parker intoned in the Music Hall that "slavery must go down," Emerson, standing in the same spot, welcomed the institution's end.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Emerson, quoted in Masur, *Lincoln's Hundred Days*, 175; Emerson, "The President's Proclamation," *Atlantic Monthly* 10 (Nov. 1862): 638–640; Dwight, "The Jubilee Concert," 327.

<sup>17</sup> George Willis Cooke, *John Sullivan Dwight, Brook-Farmer, Editor, and Critic of Music: A Biography*, (Boston: Small, Maynard, and Co., 1898), 190–192; *Sixty-Sixth Annual Report of the Executive Committee of the Benevolent Fraternity of the Churches in the City of Boston* (Boston: L. H. Lane, 1900), 44.

<sup>18</sup> Emerson, "Boston Hymn," in his *Poems* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1918), 201–203; TP, "Effect of Slavery," 336. Although Cooke has Emerson delivering the Parker Fraternity

The august audience at the Music Hall, which included not only poets such as John G. Whittier and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow but also historian Francis Parkman and Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr., applauded enthusiastically when Emerson finished. Dwight judged the poem, which was soon published in his journal as well as the *Atlantic Monthly*, “a hymn of Liberty and Justice, wild and strong.” Later that evening, Emerson reprised his performance at the home of Secret Six member George Luther Stearns, where he joined Julia Ward Howe, Bronson Alcott, Moncure Conway, and Wendell Phillips for an unveiling of a marble bust of John Brown.<sup>19</sup>

While Emerson no doubt thought about Theodore Parker as he read his “Boston Hymn” at the Music Hall, the Grand Jubilee audience appears to have had another New Romantic on its collective mind. Although she had no official role in the proceedings, Harriet Beecher Stowe became the focal point not long after word of the president’s final proclamation arrived in the hall. This announcement was, to be sure, a tremendous relief to the audience, which feared a last-minute change of heart by the president. Stowe herself had even traveled that fall to Washington to ascertain whether emancipation would, in fact, become a reality. After meeting with numerous politicians and officials, including Lincoln himself, the novelist concluded that abolitionists had nothing to fear. “It seems to be the opinion here that the president will stand up to his Proclamation,” she wrote from the capital in late November. “I have noted the thing as a glorious expectancy.”<sup>20</sup>

Many of her fellow concertgoers, however, were not convinced that New Year’s Day would be so glorious after all. At least, that is, until intermission, when a gentleman on the floor stood and announced that Lincoln’s final proclamation was “coming over the wires.” The crowd immediately erupted in “a storm of enthusiasm . . . such as was never before seen from such an audience in that place,” according to the *Liberator*. When a second man yelled, “The Proclamation is said to be all that was

lecture on Emancipation Day, his pocket diary for 1863 only mentions the Music Hall recital. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Eleanor M. Tilton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 9: 88n92.

<sup>19</sup> *Liberator*, Jan. 9, 1863; *Boston Daily Advertiser*, Jan. 2, 1863; Indagator to *Christian Inquirer*, Jan. 5, 1863, in *Christian Inquirer*, Jan. 17, 1863; Dwight, “The Jubilee Concert,” 327; Gougeon, *Virtue’s Hero*, 292; Benjamin Quarles, *Lincoln and the Negro*, 144.

<sup>20</sup> Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years, Volume Two* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1939), 10; HBS to James T. Fields, Nov. 27, 1862, quoted in Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe*, 305.

expected or desired,” three cheers were offered up for Lincoln, then three more, and three more after that. Garrison, who sat in the gallery, was recognized in a similar fashion, though his name elicited a few hisses, too.<sup>21</sup> Eventually, the crowd settled on a less divisive figure, who likewise sat in the gallery. Spotting the author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, they began waving handkerchiefs and chanting, “Mrs. Stowe! Mrs. Stowe! Mrs. Stowe!” As the cries got louder, Stowe – “her face all aglow with pleasure and excitement” – stood, moved closer to the rail, and bowed, wiping the tears from her eyes. Whether or not Lincoln ever credited Stowe with starting the Civil War, the Music Hall crowd certainly believed that she had helped bring on this day of emancipation.<sup>22</sup>

As far as we know, Stowe made no formal remarks at the Grand Jubilee Concert. In the final months of 1862, however, she had penned an essay that laid bare what the day meant to her. Defending the anti-slavery course charted by Lincoln and the Republicans in Congress to reformers in Great Britain, Stowe called the Emancipation Proclamation “the great, decisive measure of the war.” Critics misrepresent Lincoln, she argued, when they suggest that his message was, “Be loyal, and you shall keep your slaves; rebel, and they shall be free.” On the contrary, the Emancipation Proclamation must be interpreted in light of the abolishment of slavery in the District of Columbia and the western territories – developments that refashioned the very Union Lincoln sought to restore. “The President’s Proclamation simply means this,” held Stowe, “Come in, and emancipate peaceably with compensation; stay out, and I emancipate, nor will I protect you from the consequences.”<sup>23</sup>

While Boston’s liberal elite honored Stowe in the Music Hall, a more diverse set of reformers marked the occasion just a couple blocks away. Organized by the Union Progressive Association, a black club led by William C. Nell, the all-day meeting at Tremont Temple attracted thousands of black and white reformers, including Nell, Lewis Hayden, Leonard Grimes, Samuel May Jr., John S. Rock, William Wells Brown, and James Freeman Clarke. Matching the size and enthusiasm of the

<sup>21</sup> *Liberator*, Jan. 9, 1863; Mayer, *All on Fire*, 545–547; Wendell Phillips Garrison and Francis Jackson Garrison, *William Lloyd Garrison, 1805–1879: The Story of His Life Told By His Children* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1899), 4: 69–70.

<sup>22</sup> Wilson, *Crusader in Crinoline*, 486–487; Charles Edward Stowe and Lyman Beecher Stowe, *Harriett Beecher Stowe*, 211; Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe*, 306; Reynolds, *Mightier than the Sword*, ix–x.

<sup>23</sup> Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe*, 303–306; HBS, “A Reply to ‘the Affectionate and Christian Address,’” 129–130.

gatherings at Camp Saxton and in the Music Hall, the Tremont Temple meeting lasted much longer. And once again, a New Romantic was prominently featured. In this case, it was Frederick Douglass, who twice addressed the Temple crowd and then spoke again into the early morning at Grimes's Twelfth Baptist Church.<sup>24</sup>

Since Lincoln's election, Douglass had been as loud a critic of the president as had any abolitionist. But when Lincoln announced his preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, Douglass quickly became among its most enthusiastic cheerleaders. "We shout for joy that we live to record this righteous decree," he wrote in the October edition of *Douglass' Monthly*. Although well aware that "all written rules for the Government of the army and navy and people" would remain "'paper orders' . . . were they not backed up by force," the Rochester abolitionist was confident that Lincoln intended to put the full weight of the Union behind the decree.<sup>25</sup>

Like Stowe, Douglass believed the president would not reconsider his proclamation. Thus, his first Tremont Temple speech, which he offered hours before the final proclamation came over the wire, bespoke measured optimism. Douglass began by expressing "his pleasure at the near prospect of the abolition of slavery." After years of suffering in darkness, he "saw a bright light" in the future. If Emancipation Day would not immediately bring "the abolition of the curse" of slavery, it was "the beginning of the end."<sup>26</sup>

When the news of Lincoln's final proclamation arrived at the Tremont Temple, the audience, just like their Music Hall counterparts, exploded in a "wild and grand" scene. Some shouted with joy and threw their hats and bonnets in the air, others sobbed tears of relief. "The effect was electric," reported the *Christian Inquirer*. Three cheers were given for Lincoln and, according to Douglass, "almost everybody else." The celebration lasted until midnight, when much of the crowd decamped to Twelfth Baptist Church, where they continued nearly until dawn. "It was one of

<sup>24</sup> *Liberator*, Dec. 26, 1862; *Liberator*, Jan. 16, 1863; *Boston Daily Advertiser*, Jan. 2, 1863; Kantrowitz, *More Than Freedom*, 338; FD, *Life and Times*, 427-428; FD, "Emancipation and the Dawn of Light: An Address Delivered in Boston, Massachusetts, on 1 January 1863," in *FDP*, 3: 546.

<sup>25</sup> FD, "Emancipation Proclaimed," in *LWFD*, 3: 273; FD, "The Slaveholders' Rebellion. A speech delivered on the 4th day of July, 1862, at Himrods Corners, Yates Co., N.Y.," in *LWFD*, 3: 258.

<sup>26</sup> Oakes, *Radical and the Republican*, 200-202; FD, "Emancipation and the Dawn of Light," 547.

the most affecting and thrilling occasions I ever witnessed, and a worthy celebration of the first step on the part of the nation in its departure from the thralldom of ages," wrote Douglass.<sup>27</sup>

The only New Romantic who, as far as we know, did not play a central role – either in spirit or person – in an Emancipation Day celebration is Martin Robison Delany. Still committed to African emigration at the start of 1863, Delany may have not been willing to publicly express his enthusiasm for Lincoln's proclamation. Whatever the case, the black reformer's respect for the president, according to biographer Frances Rollin, matched his colleagues. In the early stages of the war, Delany detected "in the course then being pursued by Mr. Lincoln, a logical conclusion, and which, if not at first intended, would ultimately result in accomplishing the desires of the friends of freedom – emancipation to the slaves of the South, and the freedmen's rights as an inevitable consequence." And, as we have seen, Lincoln's decision to begin enlisting and arming black Americans – which he announced in his final Emancipation Proclamation – led Delany to trade black emigration for Union recruitment in a matter of months.<sup>28</sup>

Emancipation Day, in sum, was the high watermark of the New Romantics' influence and power. They took center stage at freedom celebrations from Boston to the South Carolina Sea Islands and, in the years before and after that New Year's Day, they enjoyed private sittings with the president. The fame and impact of Higginson and Stowe, Douglass and Delany, would never be greater.

New Romantic ideas were also ascendant on Emancipation Day. Lincoln's proclamation of freedom, to be sure, was a victory for every activist who had labored to end slavery in America, not to mention millions of bondspeople. As historian Manisha Sinha has written, Lincoln "had come to abolitionist ground." But these second-generation romantic reformers could take special satisfaction at the dawn of 1863. After

<sup>27</sup> *Liberator*, Jan. 16, 1863; *Christian Inquirer*, Jan. 17, 1863; FD, "The Proclamation and a Negro Army: An Address Delivered in New York, New York, on 6 February 1863," in *FDP*, 3: 568; Masur, *Lincoln's Hundred Days*, 208–209; FD, *Life and Times*, 427–430 (quotation 430).

<sup>28</sup> Rollin, *Life and Public Services*, 137. One biographer suggests that Delany was lecturing in Chicago when Lincoln issued the final proclamation, but I have neither been able to verify this claim, nor locate any information about whether he participated in Emancipation Day celebrations there. Ullman, *Martin R. Delany*, 282.

all, their distinctive approach to the problem of slavery had become – in effect – national policy.<sup>29</sup>

With a simple stroke of the pen, Lincoln had committed the United States to immediate emancipation for the majority of the nation's slaves. That the proclamation made no mention of protecting the legal and financial interests of slaveholders, nor of gradually introducing emancipation, thrilled immediatists of all stripes. Even Garrison, who had recently dismissed Lincoln as “a man ... without moral vision,” called the final proclamation “a great historic event, sublime in its magnitude, momentous and beneficent in its far-reaching consequences, and eminently just and right alike to the oppressor and the oppressed.”<sup>30</sup>

Other components of the Emancipation Proclamation, however, spoke more directly to the ideas of second-generation romantic reformers than those of their Garrisonian predecessors. The New Romantics, for one, better accommodated their perfectionist impulses to the realities of democratic institutions and practices. They urged American politicians to turn the federal government into an abolitionist instrument, even as the sectional crisis seemed to undermine that possibility. While Garrison dramatically burned the Constitution, Douglass sought to salvage the document's latent antislavery message. Once the war came, the New Romantics pushed Lincoln and his fellow Republicans in Congress to recognize that the only way to preserve the Union was to end slavery. “The circumstances of this eventful hour,” insisted Douglass in early 1862, “make the cause of the slaves and the cause of the country identical.”<sup>31</sup>

Even the disparate response of the New Romantics and Garrisonian perfectionists to the final proclamation is telling. Both sets of romantic reformers were disappointed by the document's shortcomings, particularly the exclusion of slaves who lived in the border states and many Confederate areas under Union control. But in the short term they responded quite differently. Less than two weeks after Emancipation Day, for instance, the American Anti-Slavery Society's executive committee held a special meeting in which they issued a series of unanimously adopted resolutions that underscored what Lincoln failed to accomplish. The president has been “derelict to his duty in exempting any part of the

<sup>29</sup> Manisha Sinha, “Allies for Emancipation?: Lincoln and Black Abolitionists,” in *Our Lincoln: New Perspectives on Lincoln and His World*, ed. Eric Foner (New York: Norton, 2008), 185.

<sup>30</sup> Garrison, quoted in Masur, *Lincoln's Hundred Days*, 191; *Liberator*, Jan. 2, 1863.

<sup>31</sup> FD, “The Black Man's Future in the Southern States: An Address Delivered in Boston Massachusetts, on 5 February 1862,” in *FDP*, 3: 494.

Slave States, or any portion of the slave population,” they insisted. The Garrisonian organization expressed “general joy” for the Emancipation Proclamation, but then betrayed its political tin ear by adding that “to attempt to keep a million of slaves in their chains, while essaying to liberate other millions in a similar condition, is to present a revolting spectacle to the civilized world.”<sup>32</sup>

In contrast, the New Romantics saw the glass half full. When Douglass explored Lincoln’s final Emancipation Proclamation in great detail in early February, he did not linger on the flaws that he believed were “more seeming than real.” Instead, the Rochester abolitionist told a crowd at Cooper Union in New York City that the president had produced an “amazing approximation toward the sacred truth of human liberty.” Invoking Theodore Parker’s theories of romantic intuition, he continued, “All the space between man’s mind and God’s mind, says Parker, is crowded with truths that wait to be discovered and organized into law for the better government of society.” Lincoln’s proclamation was no mere accommodation, but rather “a grand moral necessity.” For all its imperfections, it had a touch of the divine. “I believe in the millennium,” Douglass declared, “and hail this Proclamation, though wrung out under the goading lash of a stern military necessity, as one reason of the hope that is in me.” Thus, he concluded that the Emancipation Proclamation “may be called the greatest event of our nation’s history, if not the greatest event of the century.”<sup>33</sup>

If the moral foundations of the Emancipation Proclamation rewarded the New Romantics’ faith in American democracy, then its most radical provision – the commitment to recruit and arm black men – seemed to come directly out of the militant playbook of Higginson, Delany, Parker, and Douglass. The president had been quietly tiptoeing toward this decision for months. But on New Year’s Day – with the whole world watching – Lincoln publicly committed the nation to enlist its black population to fight against white southerners.

Such a dramatic policy change, unsurprisingly, sparked furious debate in Congress in the weeks that followed. After Thaddeus Stevens proposed a bill authorizing Lincoln to recruit 150,000 troops on January 12, 1863, Democrats unleashed a stream of racist invective. Some insisted

<sup>32</sup> *Liberator*, Jan. 16, 1863.

<sup>33</sup> FD, “Proclamation and a Negro Army,” 563, 551–552, 549. Three decades earlier, Parker wrote that “all the space between the finite and the Infinite Soul is full of truth; why not open the heart and welcome the light of truth?” TP to Convers Francis, March [1839], in *LCTP*, 1: 121.

that African Americans were too cowardly to fight, others that they were too barbaric to fight effectively. Republicans in Congress responded that blacks' long history of military service undercut these racist assumptions, as did the military contributions made by runaways in Virginia, Missouri, and the Sea Islands of South Carolina in the first two years of the war. "To what place and condition are they to be returned?" asked Massachusetts congressman Benjamin Thomas. "Of course not to slavery," he answered. "No man who has ever served under our flag, whether for a day or for an hour, can be made again a slave."<sup>34</sup>

The New Romantics must have been thrilled finally to hear arguments, which they had been making for the past fifteen years, served up on the floor of the House. Since the early 1850s, in one fashion or another, each of them had touted the virtues of martial heroism. The New Romantics cataloged examples of black men's fighting spirit and capacity in the United States and abroad, penning fictional accounts of black revolutionaries when history's ink well went dry. Turning time and again to Byron's ode to self-emancipation, Higginson, Delany, and Douglass insisted that black resistance was essential both to the destruction of slavery and to the salvation of the enslaved themselves. Just weeks after Benjamin Thomas said that military service foreclosed any chance that a man might be returned to slavery in congressional debates, in fact, Higginson privately made much the same point in his journal. "The better soldiers they become the more they are spoiled for slaves," he wrote of the Volunteers from his Camp Saxton quarters. "I see that the latest rule proposed in the rebel Congress is to sell by auction all slaves taken in arms – but no rational man would buy them; they know too much."<sup>35</sup>

Years later, Higginson reflected on the profound influence that William Lloyd Garrison and his early supporters had had on his own generation of romantic reformers. "The Garrisonians were generally non-resistants, but those who believed in the physical rescue of fugitive slaves were nevertheless their pupils," he wrote. "The Garrisonians eschewed voting, but many who voted drew strength from them. The Garrisonians took little part in raising troops for the war, but the tradition of their eloquence did much to impel the army." Higginson's generous tribute reflected his debt to Garrison, whom he deemed "the original force" in the abolitionist movement.<sup>36</sup> It also highlights a crucial – and often overlooked – fact

<sup>34</sup> Masur, *Lincoln's First Hundred Days*, 219–238; Foner, *Fiery Trial*, 249–258; *Congressional Globe*, 37 Cong., 3 sess., 652.

<sup>35</sup> TWH, Journal, [February 1863], in *CWJ*, 106.

<sup>36</sup> TWH, "Two Antislavery Leaders," *International Review* 9 (Aug. 1880): 145.

about the latter stages of the antislavery movement that was so dramatically on display on Emancipation Day: Higginson and his fellow New Romantics had, starting in the 1850s, taken the abolitionist baton from their Garrisonian forerunners. Even Garrison himself implicitly admitted as much when he visited Charleston, South Carolina, the cradle of American slavery, in the final days of the war. According to Delany's eyewitness account, the Bostonian editor told a group of freedpeople, "I have always advocated non-resistance; but this much I say to you, *Come what will never do you submit again to slavery! Do anything; die first! But don't submit again to them – never again be slaves.*" It was fitting that the New Romantic who had preached resistance the longest was there to hear these words.<sup>37</sup>

In the end, Lincoln's final Emancipation Proclamation enlisted the United States in a campaign for which Delany and company had been fighting for more than a decade. Four years earlier, the New Romantics had supported and encouraged John Brown as he made war on slavery. Now, the rest of the country seemed to be catching up. "Good old John Brown was a madman at Harper's Ferry," Douglass told a cheering Cooper Union crowd in February 1863. "Two years pass away, and the nation is as mad as he. Every General and every soldier that now goes in good faith to Old Virginia, goes there for the very purpose that sent honest John Brown to Harper's Ferry."<sup>38</sup>

With the United States government now a part of their army, the New Romantics sought to return the favor. In the coming months, Colonel Higginson led the Volunteers in a successful invasion of Florida, proving Lincoln's gamble on black soldiers worthwhile and likely prompting the War Department to double-down on that bet. Meanwhile, Douglass and Delany took the lead in the recruitment of blacks across the North, helping to enlist thousands of free blacks in the Union army. Among Douglass's first recruits for the soon-to-be-famous Massachusetts Fifty-fourth Regiment were his sons Charles and Lewis. They were soon joined by one of Delany's sons, Touissant L'Ouverture Delany. Though excluded from such military service by the era's gender norms, Stowe participated by familial proxy through her brother James, who, like Higginson, commanded a black regiment.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Rollin, *Life and Public Service*, 195–196.

<sup>38</sup> FD, "Proclamation and a Negro Army," 553.

<sup>39</sup> Blight, *Frederick Douglass' Civil War*, 158; Sterling, *Making of an Afro-American*, 232; Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe*, 305.

While helping to fill the Massachusetts Fifty-fourth, Douglass made clear how much had changed in America since Harpers Ferry. “Can you ask for a more inviting, ennobling and soul enlarging work, than that of making one of the glorious Band who shall carry Liberty to your enslaved people?” he asked *Douglass’ Monthly* readers in April 1863.<sup>40</sup> Byron could not have put the question any better.

<sup>40</sup> FD, “Why Should a Colored Man Enlist?” in *LWFD*, 3: 343–344.