

The Thirteenth Amendment

Looking back on it now, it's almost amazing to any modern American that we ever needed something like The Thirteenth Amendment. The very fact that the United States government had to take this step to outlaw slavery in this country once and for all tells us that the more liberated way we think in modern times was not always the way life was viewed just a few hundred years ago. In light of the long uphill struggle black history in this country represents, it is worthwhile to look back at this simple but powerful amendment which simply states...

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.

This amendment to the constitution of the United States, along with the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments represent the most dramatic changes to the fundamental law of this land in regards to civil rights in American history. And it took strong and courageous leadership by Abraham Lincoln to assure that these provisions were so imbedded into the core definition of what America was and is that there would never be a chance that slavery would rise again inside our borders.

The date to remember of the passage of this history Amendment is April 8, 1864. It was the end of the civil war and the south lay in defeat, still separated from the north before reconstruction could begin the long task of making this nation one again. The wisdom President Lincoln had to take action while the sounds of battle were still fresh in the ears of all Americans to set in stone the achievements of this bloody war cannot be overlooked.

Up until the Civil War, slavery was a common part of American life. It is painful for all Americans, black and white, to look back on a time when most Americans considered it normal for one human being to own another. While the many great strides for civil rights and equality in the decades to come would stand tall in black history, this very basic restoration of the right of African Americans to be treated as humans had to be a fundamental start to becoming full citizens of this great land.

And so with the guns of the Civil War just recently silenced by the North's victory, President Lincoln moved swiftly to make slavery a thing of the past forever. First, in 1863, he issued The Emancipation Proclamation stating in no uncertain terms that...

"all persons held as slaves within any State, or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free."

But despite the power of this proclamation, Lincoln knew that The Constitution had to be amended to make the good intent of the Emancipation Proclamation the

irrevocable law of the land. And so he championed The Thirteen Amendment through congress to assure that it was made law and that slavery could never again become a common and accepted part of American life.

It was an important start. But we all know that true freedom was still had many more battles ahead of it. When slave owners around the country, released their slaves, African Americans everywhere knew a freedom they had only dreamed of before. But it was just one step in a long uphill struggle for equality and freedom that continues on to this day.

Let us all look back on President Lincoln's vision, forward thinking and courage and let it inspire similar vision and courage in us to find ways to make American society free and equal for all citizens, black, white and for all races, creeds and colors. If we can achieve that, then we have done our part to join President Lincoln in seeking freedom for all men.

PPPPP 654