What This Cruel War Was Over:
Slavery and the Civil War

In this activity you will examine how attitudes towards slavery and the Civil War changed between 1860 and 1865. What began in the minds of President Lincoln and most northerners as a war to preserve the union changed, over the course of the war, into a war to free the slaves. This transformation occurred in large part because of the actions of enslaved and free African Americans themselves. You will create a historical marker, based on historical evidence, that addresses the question: "What was the Civil War fought over?"

Essential Question

- How did attitudes toward slavery and the Civil War change between 1860 and 1865 (as slaves fled to the Union, as northern soldiers viewed slavery firsthand while fighting in the South and after Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation)?

Instructions

1. **Step 1:** Look at the projection of "A Monument Marks the Site of Lee's Surrender." Let's read and discuss key vocabulary, key phrases, and phrases that convey meaning and point of view.
   - Who is included in this historical marker and who is left out?
   - What does the marker say about what the Civil War was fought over?
2. **Step 2:** You will each be writing a new historical marker that addresses the question: "What was the Civil War fought over?" and is based on historical evidence.
3. **Step 3:** Divide into groups of 6 students; if not you will have to double up to make sure each document is analyzed. Each group will get document sets. Each person should select one document from the set to examine using the Sources worksheet. (Make sure that every document in each set is chosen by someone). After you have individually read and analyzed your documents, you should present a summary of the document to the rest of the group. To build a synthesis of evidence, you should fill out the remaining source blocks on the worksheet as others present their documents.
4. **Step 4:** As a whole class, discuss the document set by using these prompts:
   a. What strikes you?
   b. What surprises or puzzles you?
   c. What patterns do you see?
5. **Step 5:** Please locate the Historical Marker worksheet. Working individually, each person should write a new historical marker for the Appomattox Courthouse. Then you should explain the evidence you used for your interpretation of the question: "What was the Civil War fought over?"
6. **Step 6:** A class discussion of some new historical markers. The discussion should include:
   - What role did runaway slaves play in the Civil War?
   - What difference did it make whether the North's war aim was Union or freedom?
This monument outside Appomattox Court House in Appomattox County, Virginia marks the site of General Robert E. Lee's surrender to General Ulysses S. Grant on April 9, 1865, effectively ending the Civil War. It was erected in 1929 by a memorial group that placed a total of 25 markers on Civil War battlefields in Virginia. The original marker ended with the words "to 118,000 men under Grant," but no one knows who removed that reference to the conquering Union army, or when it was removed.

Here on Sunday, April 9 1865
After four years of heroic struggle
In defense of principles they believed fundamental to the existence of our government
Lee surrendered 9000 men the remnant of an army
Still unconquered in spirit

CREATOR | Bill Coughlin
ITEM TYPE | Artifact
In 1862, American painter Eastman Johnson (1824-1906) made trips to Union encampments to witness and sketch the war's events. Throughout the war, African-American men, women, and children escaped slavery by fleeing to Union encampments. Union commanders referred them as wartime "contraband," or property forfeited by the rebellious Confederates. Johnson's few surviving depictions of actual episodes from the Civil War include his painting *A Ride for Liberty—The Fugitive Slaves*, which he described as having been "seen by myself at Centerville, on the morning of McClellan's advance towards Manassas, March 2nd, 1862." By the end of the war, nearly a million ex-slaves were under some kind of federal protection.

External Link: www.brooklynmuseum.org

**Focus Questions**

As you look at this painting, what emotions does the family of fugitive slaves evoke?

How does the artist use the horse to symbolize liberty?

**CREATOR** | Eastman Johnson
**RIGHTS** | Used by permission of the Brooklyn Museum.
**ITEM TYPE** | Painting
Born in Maine in 1824, Eastman Johnson studied in Holland and went on to paint many scenes of contemporary life in America. In 1862 he traveled to Virginia to capture scenes from the Civil War battlefront, of which only a few survive, including the oil painting *A Ride for Liberty*—The Fugitive Slaves. Johnson described this painting as "A veritable incident in the civil war seen by myself at Centerville, on the morning of McClellan's advance towards Manassas, March 2nd, 1862."

Eastman Johnson was born in Maine in 1824 and learned to paint in Holland in the 1850s. Many of the scenes he painted were of contemporary life in America. His paintings from the 1860s confronted some of the most pressing issues of the moment: slavery, abolition, emancipation, the Civil War homefront, and Reconstruction. In 1862, with many African Americans making their way to freedom behind Union lines, Eastman Johnson made trips to Union encampments to witness and sketch the war's events. Johnson's few surviving depictions of actual episodes from the Civil War include his painting *A Ride for Liberty*—The Fugitive Slaves. On the back of one version of this composition is inscribed, “A veritable incident in the civil war seen by myself at Centerville, on the morning of McClellan’s advance towards Manassas, March 2nd, 1862.” (Manassas Virginia, was a Confederate stronghold until this moment, when simultaneous defeats in Kentucky and Tennessee forced southern troops to begin a voluntary retreat.) By allowing his experience of real events to shape the painting, Johnson created a profound image in which an African-American family was the agent of its own freedom. The central subject of the painting is a group of four people on horseback: a man holding a small boy face forward and a woman clutching a baby who looks back over her shoulder. The relationship among the riders is left for the viewer to interpret.


Summary of the Emancipation Proclamation

Despite his personal opposition to slavery, when President Abraham Lincoln took office in 1861 he insisted that his constitutional duty was to keep the nation together, not to abolish slavery. He conducted the first year of the war with the goal of reuniting the Union, but wartime events, including heavy military losses and the many slaves who escaped behind Union battle lines, forced him to contend with the issue of slavery. He issued a preliminary Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, 1862 and the final version on January 1, 1863, fundamentally changing the meaning of the war.

The final Emancipation Proclamation:

- Declared "forever free" more than 3.5 million slaves in Confederate areas still in rebellion against the Union
- Promised that the federal government and military would "recognize and maintain the freedom" of the freed slaves
- Did not free almost half a million slaves in the border states loyal to the Union (Maryland, Missouri, Delaware, Kentucky) and in some other areas under Union control
- Asked the newly freed slaves to avoid violence unless in self-defense and recommended that they work for wages
- Announced that African-American men could enlist in the Union army and navy
- Described these actions as "an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity"

SOURCE | American Social History Project/Center for Media and Learning, 2008.
CREATOR | American Social History Project/Center for Media and Learning.
ITEM TYPE | Article/Essay
Although the attitudes of many white Union soldiers toward slavery and emancipation ranged from indifference to outright racial hostility, others viewed the issue as central to their participation in the war. The following quotations, taken from letters, diary entries, and contemporary newspaper interviews with white Union soldiers, reveal the attitudes of those who viewed slavery as both a primary cause of the conflict and a key rationale for fighting.

“… The rebellion is abolitionizing the whole army… [time spent in the South has forced Union troops] “to face this sum of all evils, and cause of the war… You have no idea of the changes that have taken place in the minds of the soldiers in the last two months… men of all parties seem unanimous in the belief that to permanently establish the Union, is to first wipe [out] the institution [of slavery].”
— “Enlisted Soldier,” Third Wisconsin, quoted in the Wisconsin State Journal, October 1861.

“… As long as we ignore the fact (practically) that Slavery is the basis of this struggle so long are we simply [cutting] down a vigorously growing plant that will continually spring up and give new trouble at very short intervals. We must emancipate.”

“… Our Government handles slavery as tenderly as a mother would her firstborn… When shall it be stricken down as the deadly enemy of freedom, virtue, and mankind?”
— Lt. P.V. Wise, First Wisconsin, quoted in the Wisconsin State Journal, January 20, 1862.

“As sure as God is God and right is right, so sure may we look for the war to end . . . in the accomplishment of its glorious object, . . . the liberation of this oppressed and down trodden race . . . I would prefer ten years war yet and no more slavery, than Peace tomorrow, with slavery. Such is my abhorance of that Barbarous institution.”
— Sgt James Jessee, Eighth Illinois, diary entry, December 31, 1863.

CREATOR | Various
ITEM TYPE | Diary/Letter
"Colored Citizens, To Arms!"

This 1864 poster was used to recruit African-American soldiers for the 20th Regiment, U.S. Colored Troops, a Union Army regiment based in New York state. The poster offers the lure of an up-front payment of $375 plus an additional $10 for anyone signing up, but likely more persuasive was the sentiment borne by the stern-looking eagle: "Who would be Free, Himself must Strike the Blow!" Such recruitment efforts were met with an enthusiastic reception by African-American men of fighting age, with thousands enlisting after legislation was passed allowing them to serve in 1863.

Focus Questions

Does the poster appeal more to personal or financial reasons for joining the army?

What words or phrases make a personal appeal to join the army?

What words or phrases make a financial appeal to join the army?

CREATOR | Francis & Loutrel
ITEM TYPE | Poster/Print
Before-and-After Photograph of an African-American Union Recruit

This Civil War photograph shows Private Hubbard Pryor, an escaped slave from Georgia, before and after his enlistment in the 44th U.S. Colored Troops, a Union Army regiment of African-American soldiers. Congress passed legislation allowing some African Americans to serve in the Union Army in August 1862, and when Lincoln announced the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, he extended the recruitment of black soldiers nationwide. By war's end, almost 200,000 African-American men served in the Union forces.

CREATOR | War Department
ITEM TYPE | Photograph
Lincoln in Richmond

This ink-and-wash drawing depicts Lincoln's dramatic entry into Richmond, Virginia on April 4, 1865, only a day after it had fallen to Union troops in the last major battle of the Civil War. The President and his son Tad made the short journey from Washington, D.C. to the former Confederate capital to tour the ruins and celebrate victory. Although they were formally escorted by twelve U.S. sailors, an eyewitness observed that in his two-mile walk around the city, Lincoln hardly saw his guards because he was "directed by negroes." Lincoln’s enthusiastic reception by newly freed slaves represented the culmination of his gradual shift of the war’s aims, a process made official when he issued the Emancipation Proclamation.

SOURCE | Lambert Hollis, Lincoln in Richmond, ink-and-wash drawing, 4 April 1865; from Smithsonian Education website, http://smithsonianeducation.org/educators/.
CREATOR | Lambert Hollis
ITEM TYPE | Poster/Print
## WHAT THIS CRUEL WAR WAS OVER: THE SOURCES

Use this worksheet to examine your assigned primary source, and then collaborate with your group to fill in the remaining sources. Consider the following: who (person or group) does the source represent; what key symbol, quote, or “close-up” best captures the main point; and what goals of the Civil War does the source identify (ie. what is the war being fought for?).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOURCE 1: Eastman Johnson’s <em>Ride for Liberty</em></th>
<th>SOURCE 4: Union Army Recruitment Poster</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who?</td>
<td>Who?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Symbol/Close-Up?</td>
<td>Key Symbol or Quote?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals?</td>
<td>Goals?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOURCE 2: Summary of Emancipation Proclamation</th>
<th>SOURCE 5: Before-and-After Photo of Soldier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who?</td>
<td>Who?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Quote?</td>
<td>Key Symbol/Close-Up?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals?</td>
<td>Goals?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOURCE 3: Union Soldiers Condemn Slavery</th>
<th>SOURCE 6: Lambert Hollis, <em>Lincoln in Richmond</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who?</td>
<td>Who?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Quote?</td>
<td>Key Symbol/Close-Up?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals?</td>
<td>Goals?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WHAT THIS CRUEL WAR WAS OVER: HISTORICAL MARKER

You have been commissioned by the state of Virginia to develop a historical marker that will be placed in front of the Appomattox courthouse where Confederate generals surrendered to the Union army in April 1865. Your task is to develop the inscription of the marker that describes why the Civil War was fought. Your inscription should take into account:

- Who is being commemorated?
- How the goals of the war changed between 1861-65

How I came to this interpretation (what documents most impacted your interpretation?):

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

NAME ___________________________________________ (Write on back if you need more room)