

Black History Month

A Florida Focus

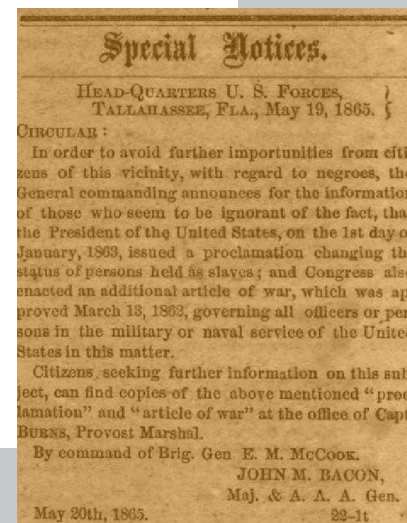
A CIVICS IN REAL LIFE SERIES: CIVICS CONNECTION SPOTLIGHT

Spotlight #20: Emancipation Day

Three years into the bloody Civil War, President Lincoln issued the [Emancipation Proclamation](#). Historically, many have misinterpreted the impact of this proclamation, summarizing it with the misnomer that “Lincoln/the Emancipation Proclamation freed the slaves.” In reality, the words of the Emancipation Proclamation were limited in many ways. Issued on January 1, 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation declared “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.” First, this proclamation only applied to [southern states that had succeeded](#) and not to the border states. Southern states that had already come under control of the Union as a result of the war were also exempt. Lastly, freedom was contingent on a Union military victory. In the end, Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation proved to be more of an important morale boost. True emancipation eventually came with the end of the Civil War on August 9, 1865 when Confederate General Robert E. Lee [surrendered](#) to U.S. Army General Ulysses S. Grant. However, news of the emancipation reached each state at a different time, mostly because communication systems like the telegraph had their infrastructure destroyed during the war. This is why states may celebrate Emancipation Day on different dates. Florida, for example, celebrates [Emancipation Day on May 20th](#). This is because the news of emancipation was read from the steps of the [Knott House](#) in Tallahassee by Union Brigadier General Edward M. McCook on May 20, 1865, 11 days after the end of the Civil War. [Juneteenth](#), the federal emancipation holiday, occurs on June 19th because it was on that day in 1865 when Major General Gordon Granger ordered the final enforcement of the Emancipation Proclamation in Galveston, Texas. Ultimately, it would be the [13th Amendment](#) to the U.S. Constitution, ratified December 6, 1865, that abolished slavery and involuntary servitude. In 1865, newly freed slaves in Florida celebrated the announcement with a picnic at Bull’s Pond, today known as Lake Ella. Today, whether on a state’s Emancipation Day, or Juneteenth, Americans celebrate, honor, and recognize this day with parades, concerts, speeches, reenactment readings, and other activities.

CONNECTION QUESTIONS

- Why is it important to recognize patriotic holidays or observances?
- What impact did the 13th Amendment have on American society and the political process?



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