

# The Thirteenth Amendment

## Background

At the time the Civil War broke out, many people believed that slavery was immoral and that the government should use the war as an opportunity to finally put an end to it. Although he was personally opposed to slavery, Abraham Lincoln believed that outlawing slavery would anger northerners who did not feel strongly about slavery. He also feared that putting an end to slavery might lead to the secession of the border states, slave states that had remained in the Union. In addition, Lincoln did not believe that the Constitution gave him the authority to end slavery.

As the war dragged on, however, more northerners began to support the idea of ending slavery in the South. Many people believed that slavery provided the labor the South needed to win the war. On January 1, 1863, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing all slaves in rebel areas of the South.

The Emancipation Proclamation did not end slavery altogether, however. Slavery still existed in the border states and in Confederate areas under Union control. Lincoln and Congress knew that only a constitutional amendment could end slavery throughout the United States. In April 1864, a bill recommending an amendment outlawing slavery passed the Senate; however, it failed in the House of Representatives. President Lincoln stepped in to push the bill through the House, insisting that the Republican Party include the passage of the amendment in its party platform. With Lincoln's support, the House finally approved the amendment

on January 31, 1865, and the amendment went to the states for approval. On December 18, 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment went into effect, officially freeing all slaves in the United States.

## About the Document

The document on this card is the original congressional joint resolution proposing a constitutional amendment to end slavery. Approved by Congress in January 1865, the amendment went to the states for approval. Although not required by law, President Lincoln signed the resolution, approving what would become the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The first state to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment was Abraham Lincoln's home state of Illinois. After originally rejecting the amendment, in 1995 Mississippi became the final state to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment.

## Classroom Activity

Imagine that you live in a border state in 1865. The Thirteenth Amendment has been proposed, but your state has yet to ratify it. Create a flyer or poster convincing people in your state to support the amendment to outlaw slavery. Remember to use persuasive language and to highlight reasons why people should back the amendment.

Thirty. Eighth Congress of the United States.

At Washington: Submitting to the Legislatures of the several States a proposition to amend the Constitution of the United States.

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, (two thirds of both Houses concurring) that the following article be approved to the Legislatures of the several States as an Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which, when ratified by three fourths of said Legislatures, shall be valid, to all intents and purposes as a part of the said Constitution, namely;

ARTICLE XIII.

Section 1. 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.

Section 2. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Attest:

W. F. Johnson  
Secretary of the Senate

Stephen A. Cooper, Speaker of the House of Representatives

W. G. Sumner, Vice President of the United States

and President of the Senate

Black of the House of Representatives

Approved February 1, 1865. Abraham Lincoln

At the Senate, April 8, 1864.

W. F. Johnson	J. D. Stevenson	W. G. Sumner	A. S. Davis	John Cornwell
W. F. Johnson	John C. Brown	Henry Wilson	W. G. Sumner	W. G. Sumner
W. F. Johnson	W. G. Sumner	W. G. Sumner	W. G. Sumner	W. G. Sumner
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W. F. Johnson	W. G. Sumner	W. G. Sumner	W. G. Sumner	W. G. Sumner

Joint Resolution Submitting 13th Amendment to the States; signed by Abraham Lincoln and Congress, 1865, The Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress