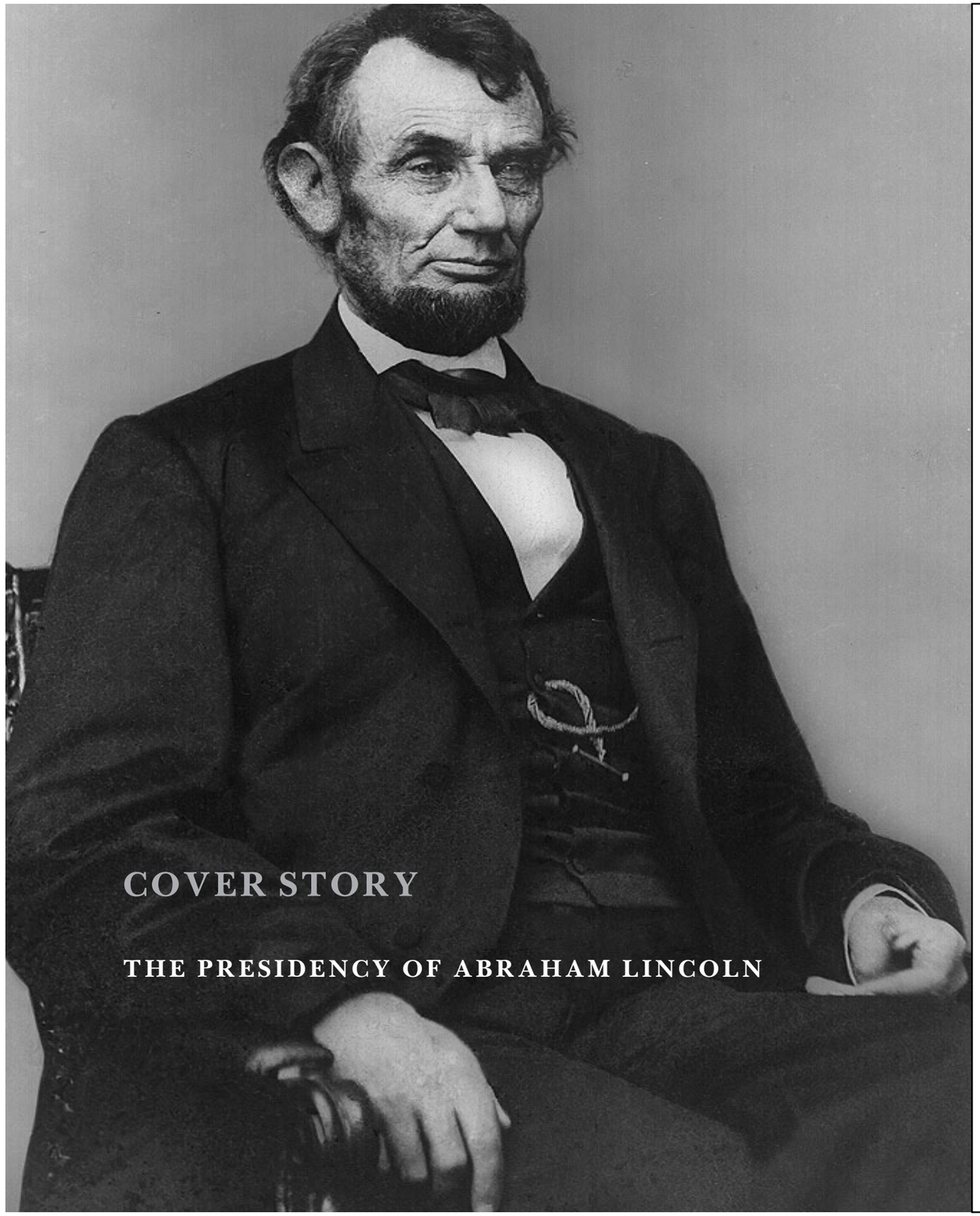

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Fort Sumter

The commander of Ft. Sumter, S.C. sent a request for provisions to Washington, and the execution of Lincoln's order to meet that request was seen by the secessionists as an act of war.[127] On April 12, 1861, Confederate forces fired on Union troops at Fort Sumter, forced them to surrender and thus the war began.[128] Historian Allan Nevins argued that the newly inaugurated Lincoln miscalculated in believing that he could preserve the Union,[129] and future general William Tecumseh Sherman, then a civilian, visited Lincoln in the White House during inauguration week and was "sadly disappointed" at Lincoln's seeming failure to realize that "the country was sleeping on a volcano" and the South was "'preparing for war'".[130] Donald concluded Lincoln fairly estimated the events leading to the initiation of war. "His repeated efforts to avoid collision in the months between inauguration and the firing on Ft. Sumter showed he adhered to his vow not to be the first to shed fraternal blood. But he also vowed not to surrender the forts. The only resolution of these contradictory positions was for the confederates to fire the first shot; they did just that."[127]

The War Expands

On April 15, Lincoln called on the states to send detachments totaling 75,000 troops[131] to recapture forts, protect the capital, and "preserve the Union", which in his view still existed intact despite the actions of the seceding states.[132]

These events forced the states to choose sides. Virginia declared its secession, after which the Confederate capital was moved from Montgomery to Richmond. North Carolina, Tennessee and Arkansas also voted for secession over the next two months. Missouri, Kentucky and Maryland threatened secession,[131] but neither they nor the slave state of Delaware seceded.

Troops headed south towards Washington, D.C. to protect the capital in response to Lincoln's call. On April 19, angry secessionist mobs in Baltimore that controlled the rail links attacked Union troops traveling to the capital. George William Brown, the Mayor of Baltimore, and other suspect Maryland politicians were arrested and imprisoned as Lincoln suspended the writ of habeas corpus.[133] John Merryman, a leader in the secessionist group in Maryland asked Chief Justice Roger Taney to issue a writ of habeas corpus which he did, saying Lincoln's action of holding Merryman without a hearing was unlawful. Lincoln ignored it.[134]

Assuming Command for the Union in the War

As Commander in Chief, Lincoln confronted in the war an unprecedented crisis, and he responded, using unprecedented powers which no President had wielded. He used his war powers to impose a blockade, to disburse funds before appropriation by Congress, and to suspend the writ of habeas corpus, arresting and imprisoning thousands of suspected Confederate sympathizers without warrant.[135]

The war effort was the source of continued disparagement of Lincoln from every direction, and occupied most of his time and attention, while he also mourned the death of son Willie. From the start it was clear that bipartisan support would be essential to success in the war effort, and any manner of compromise alienated factions on both sides of the aisle, such as the appointment of Republicans and Democrats to command positions in the Union Army.[136] Copperheads and other opponents of the war criticized Lincoln for refusing to compromise on the slavery issue. Conversely, the Radical Republicans criticized him for moving too slowly in abolishing slavery.[137]

General Fremont

In August 1861, General John Fremont in Missouri, created controversy on the Republican side when he issued, without consulting Lincoln, a proclamation of martial law in the entire state. He declared that any citizen found bearing arms could be court-martialed and shot, and that slaves of persons aiding the rebellion would be freed. Charges of negligence in his command of the Department of the West were compounded with allegations of fraud and corruption. Lincoln's efforts to reign him in were futile, and he was given another command in November. This decision in large part prevented the secession of Kentucky while incurring the wrath of many in the North.[138]

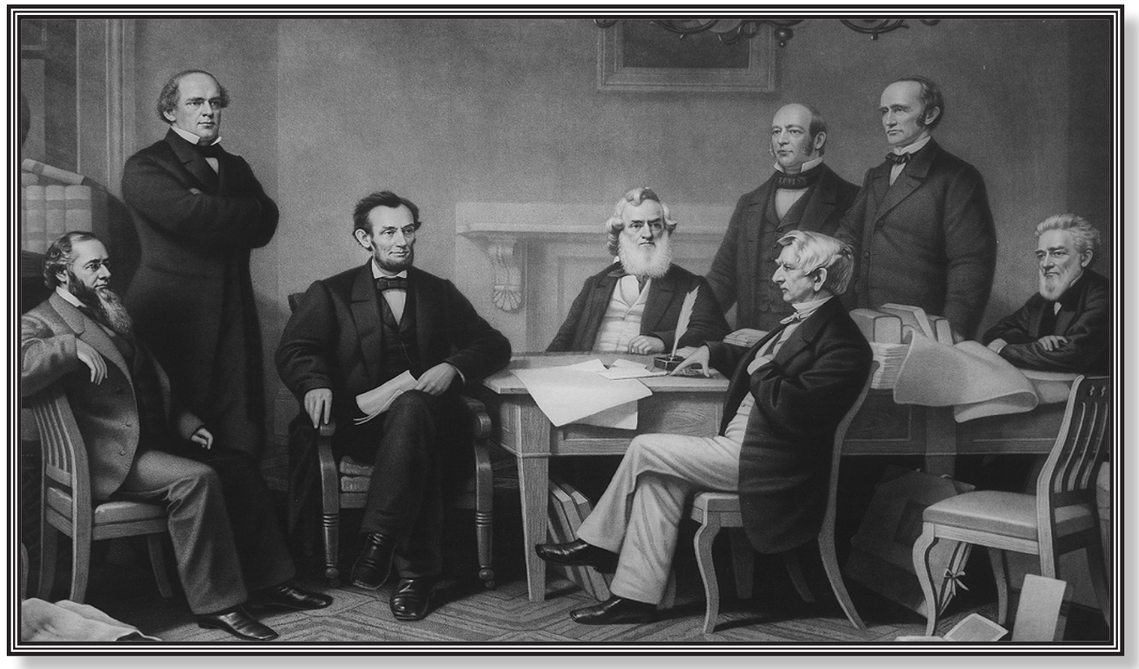
Foreign Policy

The war assumed foreign policy implications in 1861 when James Mason and John Slidell, ministers of the Confederacy to Great Britain and France, boarded the British ship Trent in Havana, Cuba. The U.S. Navy illegally intercepted the Trent on the high seas and seized the two Confederate envoys; Britain protested vehemently while American public opinion cheered. Lincoln managed to resolve the issue by releasing the two men.[139]

Lincoln's foreign policy approach had been initially hands off, due to his inexperience; he left most diplomacy appointments and other foreign policy matters to his Secretary of State, William Seward. Seward's initial reaction to the Trent affair however, was too bellicose, so Lincoln from that time also turned to Sen. Charles Sumner, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and an expert in British diplomacy.[140]

War Policy

Despite his lack of expertise in military affairs, Lincoln studied books from the Library of Congress and devoured the telegraphic reports, keeping close tabs on all phases of the military effort and making a special effort to consult with governors and to select generals in terms of their past success. In January 1862, after numerous complaints about the running of the War Department, Lincoln dismissed the inept Secretary Simon Cameron and replaced him with Edwin Stanton, a reputedly superb leader.[141] In terms of war strategy, Lincoln articulated two priorities: to ensure that Washington was well defended; and to conduct an aggressive war effort that would satisfy the demand in the North for prompt, decisive victory; indeed, major northern newspaper editors expected victory within 90 days.[142] Two days a week, Lincoln would meet with his cabinet in the afternoon, and occasionally his wife would force him to take a carriage ride because she was concerned he was working too hard.[143] Lincoln grasped the need to control strategic points (such as the Mississippi River and the fortress city of Vicksburg), and understood the importance of defeating the enemy's army, rather than simply capturing territory.[144]



EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION

Lincoln maintained that his power to end slavery was limited by the Constitution. He expected the eventual extinction of slavery would result from preventing its expansion into new U.S. territory. He also sought to persuade the states to accept compensated emancipation in return for their prohibition of slavery (an offer that took effect only in Washington, D.C.). Lincoln believed that curtailing slavery in this manner would economically expunge it, as envisioned by the Founding Fathers.[176]

In July 1862, Congress passed the Second Confiscation Act, which freed the slaves of anyone convicted of aiding the rebellion. Although Lincoln believed it was not within Congress's power to free the slaves, he approved the bill in deference to the legislature. He felt freeing the slaves could only be done by the Commander in Chief using war powers granted by the Constitution. In that month, Lincoln discussed a draft of the Emancipation Proclamation with his cabinet. In it, he stated that "as a fit and necessary military measure" on January 1, 1863, "all persons held as a slaves" in the Confederate states will" thenceforward, and forever, be free".[177]

In a shrewd reply to a denigrating editorial by Horace Greeley of the New York Tribune which urged emancipation as a prerequisite to military success, the President subordinated the goal of ending slavery to the primary goal of preserving the Union. Privately, Lincoln had in fact concluded at this point that the war could not be won without freeing the slaves, and so it was a necessity "to do more to help the cause":

> *"My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union."[178]*

The Emancipation Proclamation, issued on September 22, 1862, and put into effect on January 1, 1863, freed slaves in territories not already under Union control. Once the abolition of slavery in the rebel states became a military objective, as Union armies advanced south, more slaves were liberated until all of them in Confederate territory (over three million) were freed. Lincoln's comment on the signing of the Proclamation was: "I never, in my life, felt more certain that I was doing right, than I do in signing this paper."[179] A few days after the Emancipation was announced, 13 Republican governors met at the War Governors' Conference; they supported the president's Proclamation, but suggested the removal of General George B. McClellan as commander of the Union Army.[180]

For some time, Lincoln continued earlier plans to set up colonies for the newly freed slaves. He commented favorably on colonization in the Emancipation Proclamation, but all attempts at such a massive undertaking failed. Lincoln later sought to incorporate the policy of the proclamation into the Constitution through passage of the 13th Amendment, permanently abolishing slavery throughout the nation.[181] He personally lobbied individual Congressmen for the amendment, which was passed by Congress in early 1865, shortly before his death.[182]

The Use of Negro Troops

Using black troops and former slaves was official government policy after the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation. At first Lincoln was reluctant to fully implement this program, but by the spring of 1863 he was ready to initiate "a massive recruitment of Negro troops". In a letter to Andrew Johnson, the military governor of Tennessee, encouraging him to lead the way in raising black troops, Lincoln wrote, "The bare sight of 50,000 armed and drilled black soldiers on the banks of the Mississippi would end the rebellion at once."[183] By the end of 1863, at Lincoln's direction, General Lorenzo Thomas had recruited 20 regiments of blacks from the Mississippi Valley.[184] Frederick Douglass once observed that Lincoln was "the first great man that I talked with in the United States freely who in no single instance reminded me I was a Negro".[185]