



# INSIDE THE VAULT

*The Battle of Antietam and the Preliminary  
Emancipation Proclamation*

with Dr. Edward Ayers

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2025

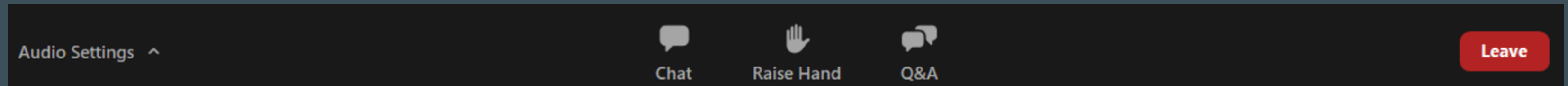
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THE  
GILDER LEHRMAN  
INSTITUTE  
of  
AMERICAN HISTORY

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# How to Participate



- If you would like to ask a question, you can use the Q&A feature.
- We will be answering audience questions throughout the session.
- The views expressed here are those of the historian.

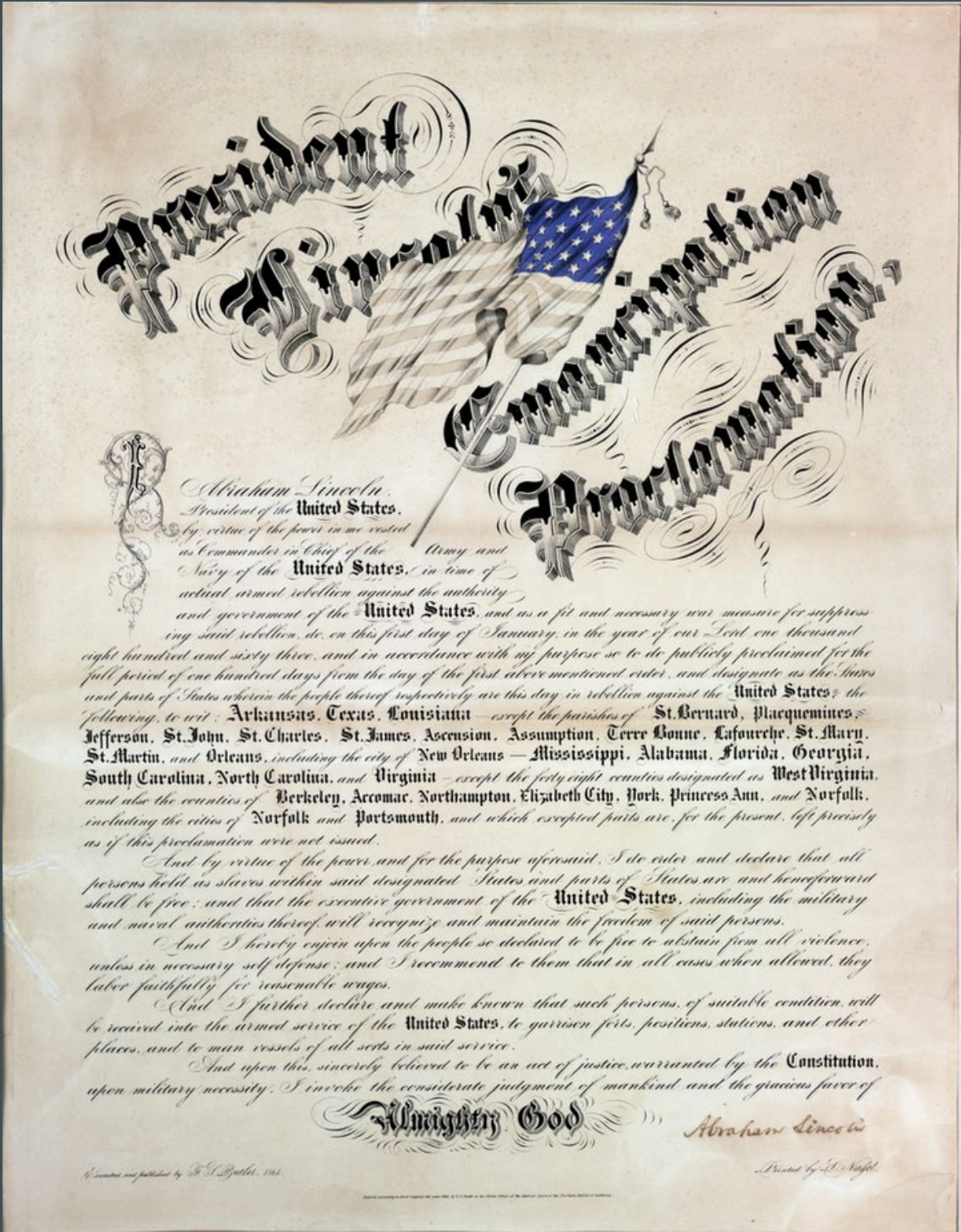
## For Security and Privacy

- Your microphone is automatically muted.
- Your camera is automatically turned off.

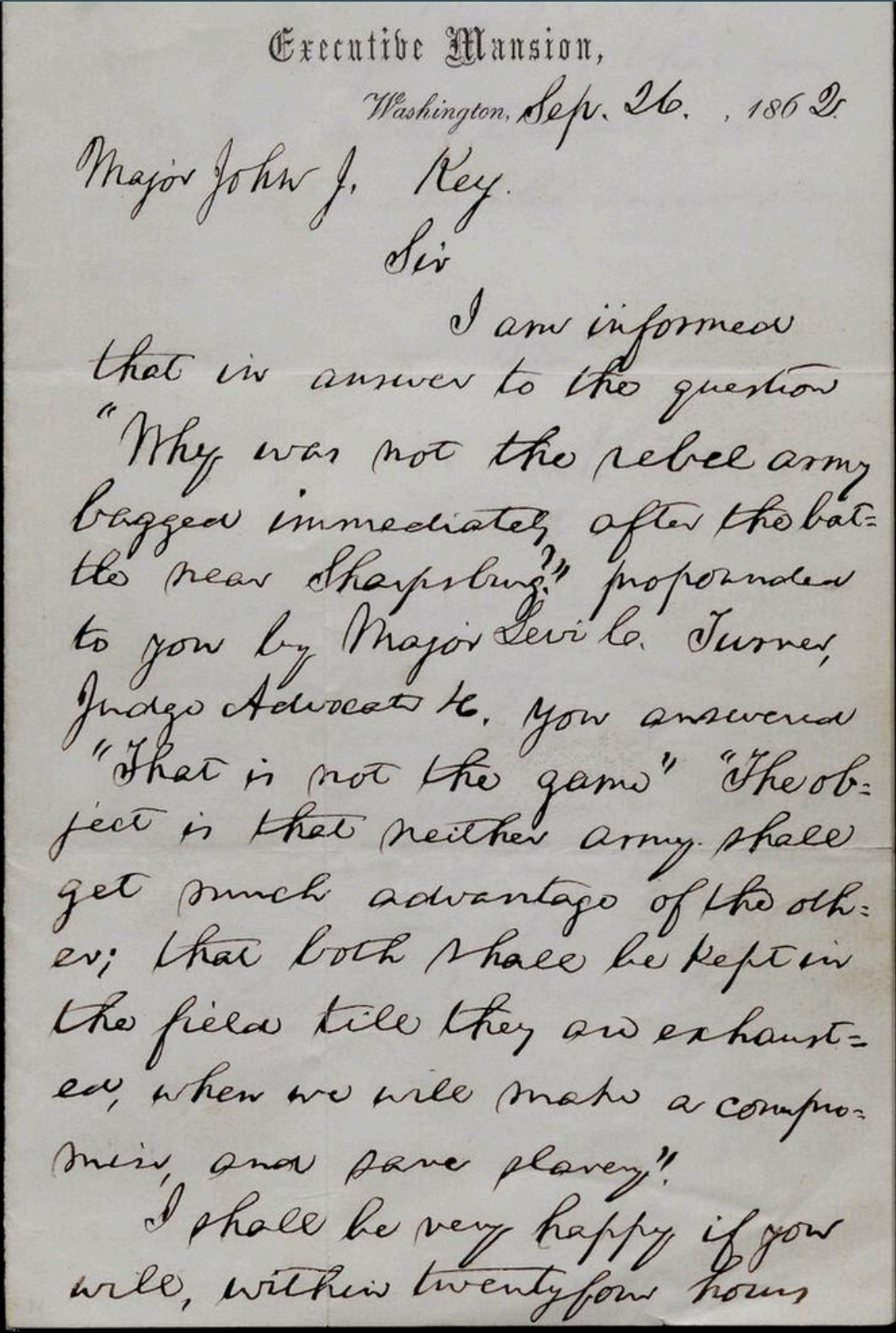




# Today's Documents



Emancipation Proclamation, written by Abraham Lincoln, January 1, 1863. Printed by S. F. Butler in 1864. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC00742)



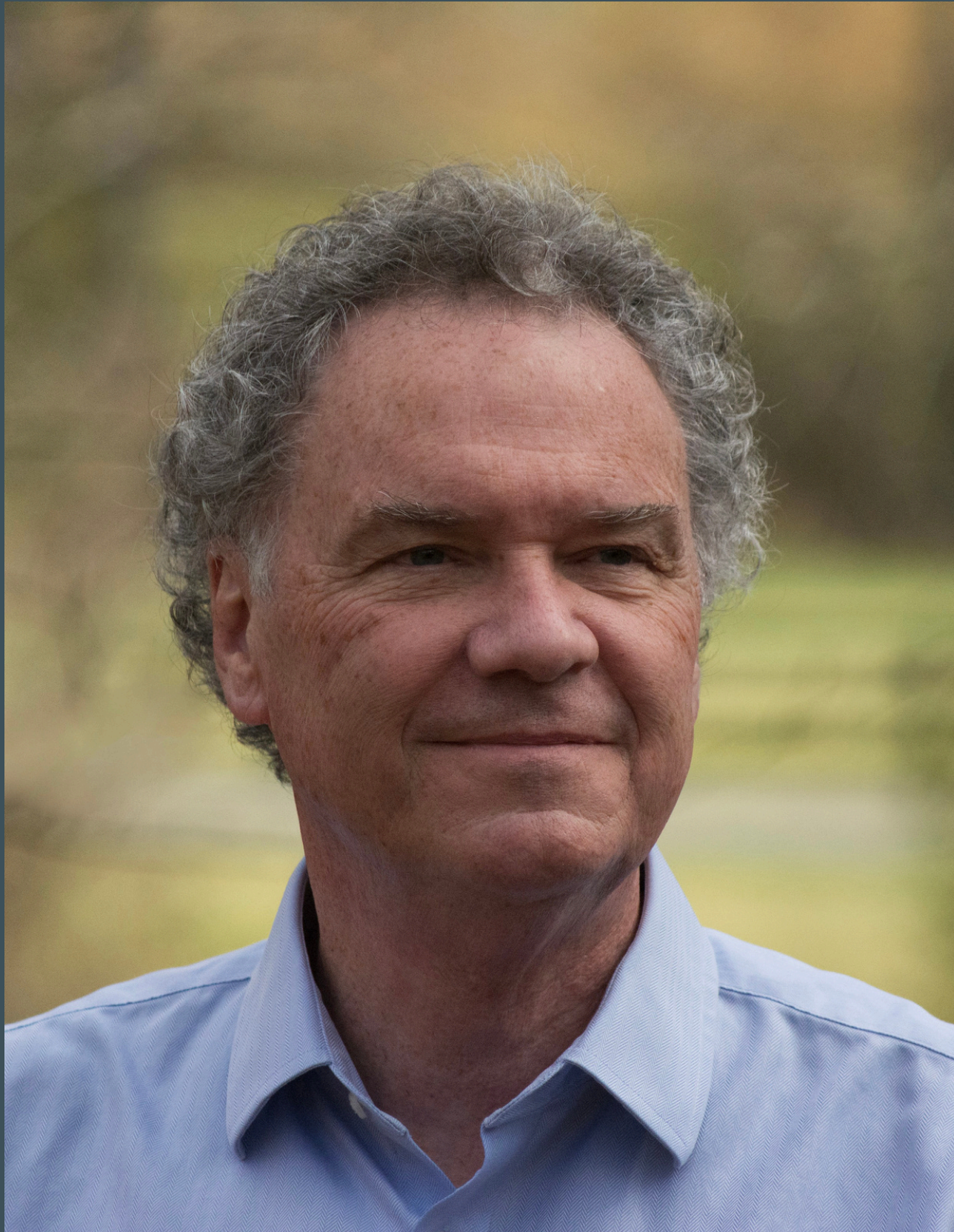
Letter from Abraham Lincoln to General John Key, September 26, 1862. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC00228)



View of Fallen Soldiers at Antietam, photograph by Alexander Gardner, ca. 1861-1865. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC05111.01.0888)



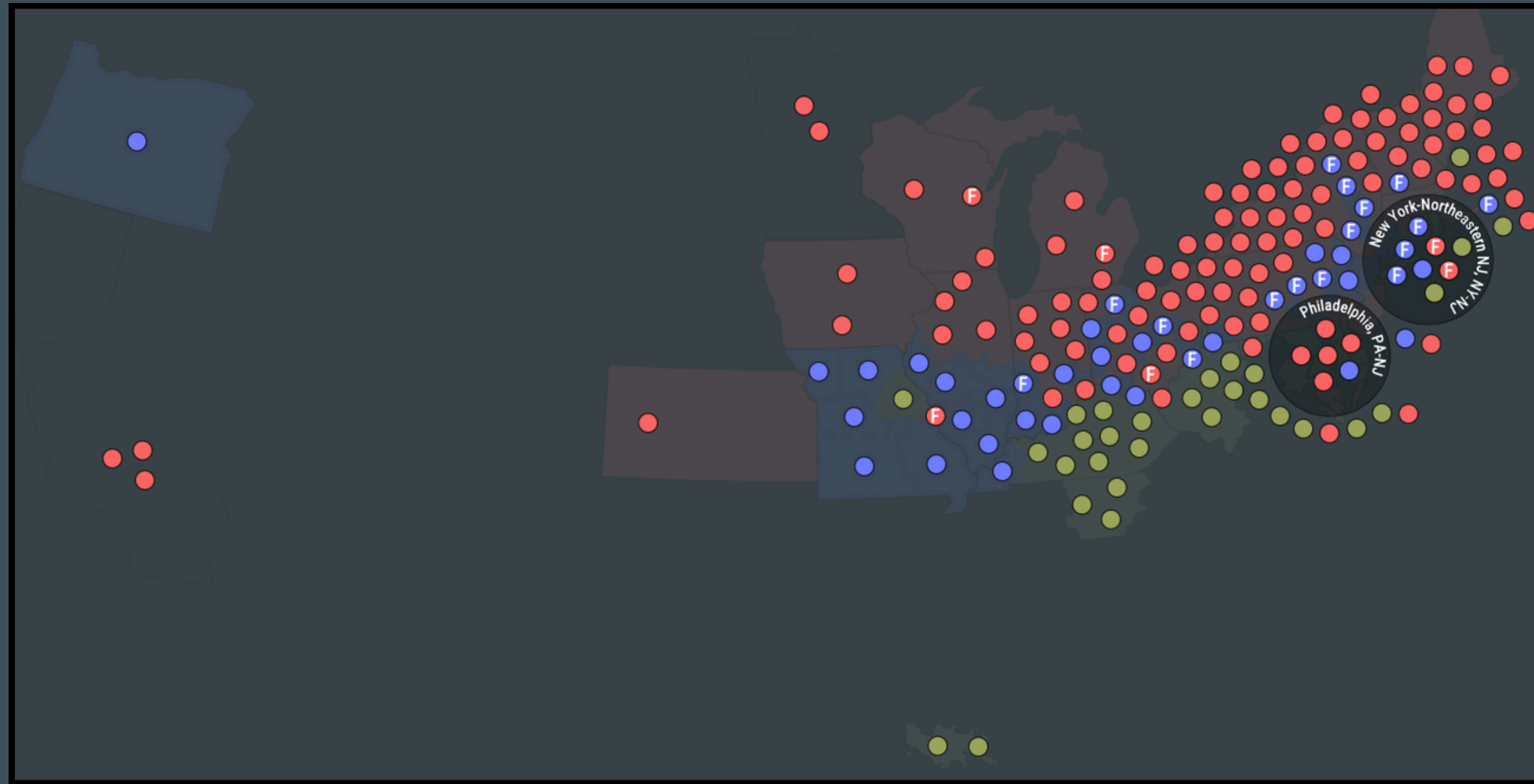
# Dr. Edward Ayers



Edward Ayers is Tucker-Boatwright Professor of the Humanities and President Emeritus at the University of Richmond. He has been named National Professor of the Year, received the National Humanities Medal from President Obama at the White House, won the Bancroft, Beveridge, and Lincoln prizes in American history, and served as president of the Organization of American Historians. He is Executive Director of *New American History* and *Bunk*, online projects designed to help students and teachers see the nation's history in new ways.



# What was the political geography of the Civil War?



## Election of 1860

- House membership dropped to 183 seats because of secession
- Unionist Party emerged and gained 30 seats
- 108 Republicans (red), 45 Democrats (blue), and 30 Unionists (green)

Electing the House of Representatives, 1940–2024, in *American Panorama: An Atlas of United States History*, University of Richmond Digital Scholarship Lab, 2025.

<https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/congress/>



# EMANCIPATION AND CIVIL WAR TIMELINE



**KEY**  
Emancipation Movement  
Civil War



# Lincoln drafts the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation



From left to right the men are identified as Edwin M. Stanton, Salmon P. Chase, President Lincoln, Gideon Welles, Caleb B. Smith, William H. Seward, Montgomery Blair, and Edward Bates.

*The First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation, July 22, 1862, a print by Francis Bicknell Carpenter, 1866. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC10020)*



# The Battle of Antietam



*The Battle of Antietam, MD. Sept 17<sup>th</sup> 1862*, a print by Currier & Ives, circa 1862. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC02881.31)

## Overview

- September 17, 1862, in Sharpsburg, Maryland
- Single bloodiest day in the war (23,000 casualties)
- Union victory, ended Confederate invasion of the North
- Battlefield photographs by Alexander Gardner
- Lincoln issued a **Preliminary** Emancipation Proclamation five days after



Dead soldiers and artillery horses at Antietam. Photograph by Alexander Gardner, September 19, 1862. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC05111.01.0754)



# Photography & the Battle of Antietam



## “The Dead of Antietam” Exhibition

- October 1862 in Manhattan, NY
- Photographs by Mathew Brady, Alexander Gardner, and James Gibson
- The first images to show dead bodies on the field

“As it is, the dead of the battle-field come up to us very rarely, even in dreams. We see the list in the morning paper at breakfast, but dismiss its recollection with the coffee. There is a confused mass of names, but they are all strangers; we forget the horrible significance that dwells amid the jumble of type. . . . Mr. BRADY has done something to bring home to us the terrible reality and earnestness of war. If he has not brought bodies and laid them in our dooryards and along the streets, he has done something very like it.”

New York Times, *Brady's Photographs. Pictures of the Dead at Antietam*, October 20, 1862

*View of Fallen Soldiers at Antietam*, photograph by Alexander Gardner, ca. 1861–1865. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC05111.01.0888)



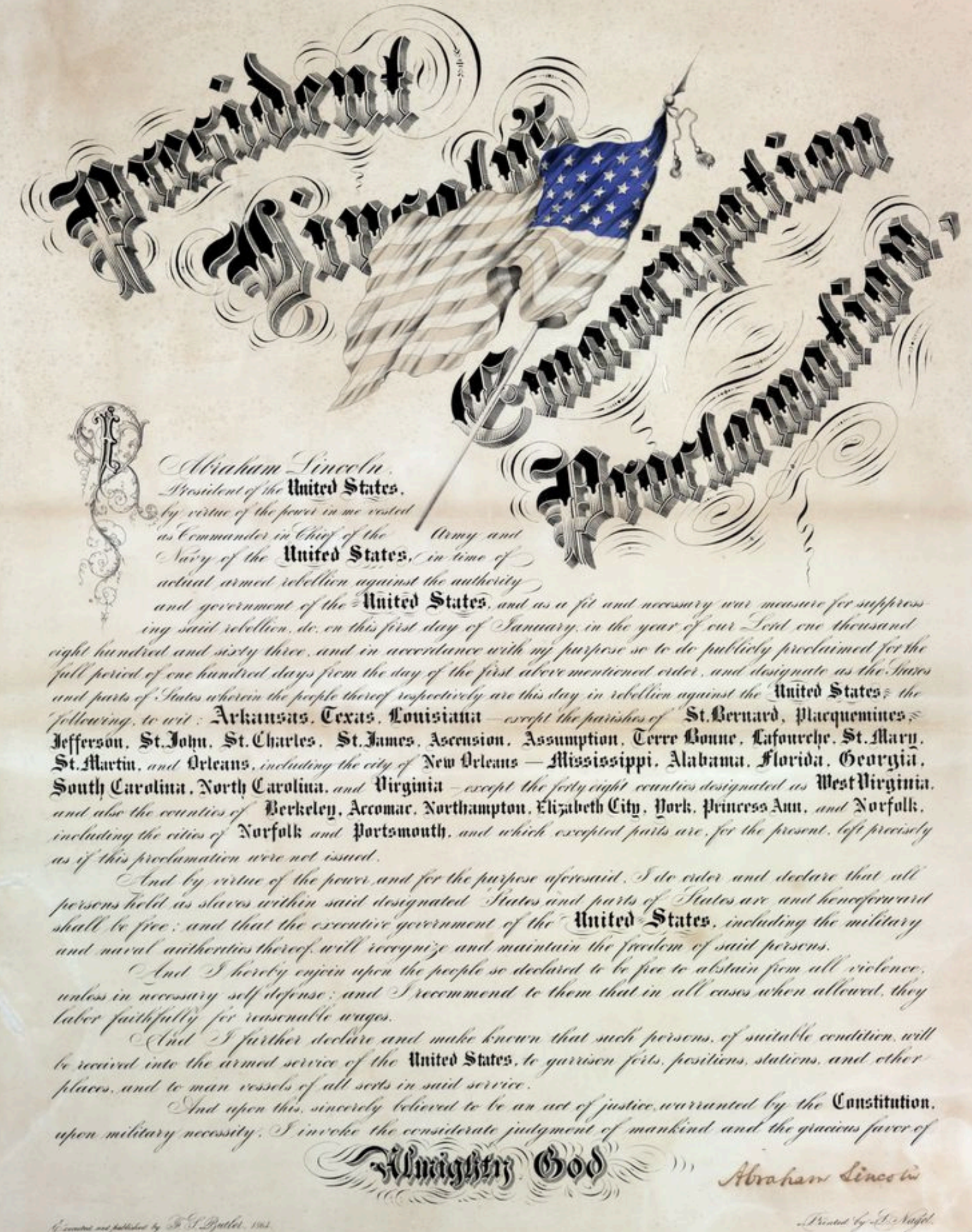


# The Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation

Issued on September 22, 1862



Emancipation Proclamation, written by Abraham  
Lincoln, January 1, 1863.  
(Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC00742)





# The Impact of the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation



Freedom Seekers coming into Union Lines at Fort Monroe, circa January 1863. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC05111.01.0925)



[Broadside recruiting African Americans for military service], 1863. (Gilder Lehrman Institute. GLC04198)



# Union Soldiers and Emancipation



“The ‘year of jubilee’ has indeed come to the poor Slave. . . . The name of Abraham Lincoln will be handed down to posterity, as one of the greatest benefactors of his country, not surpassed by the immortal Washington himself. . . . Oh! what a day for rejoicing will it be, when America the boasted ‘land of the free and home of the brave’ shall have erased from its fair escutcheon the black Stain of human Slavery. The majority of the people, and of the Soldiers will sustain the President in his act, it is well received by the army in this department, believed to be the right thing, at the right time. . . .”

Letter from Union soldier John P. Jones to his wife, October 3, 1862.

(Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC05981.09)



Executive Mansion,

Washington, Sep. 26, 1862

Major John J. Key.

Sir

I am informed  
that in answer to the question  
"Why was not the rebel army  
bagged immediately after the bat-  
tle near Sharpsburg?" propounded  
to you by Major Levi L. Turner,  
Judge Advocate G. You answered  
"That is not the game" "The ob-  
ject is that neither army shall  
get much advantage of the oth-  
er; that both shall be kept in  
the field till they are exhaust-  
ed, when we will make a compro-  
mise, and save slavery!"

I shall be very happy if you  
will, within twenty-four hours

# Major John J. Key's Opinion

"The object is that neither army  
shall get much advantage of the  
other; that both shall be kept in  
the field till they are exhausted,  
when we will make a  
compromise, and save slavery."

Abraham Lincoln quoting Major John J. Key's remarks to Major Turner in  
a letter, September 26, 1862. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC00228)





# Lincoln Confronts Major Key

“In my view it is wholly inadmissable for any gentleman holding a military commission from the United States to utter such sentiments as Major Key is within proven to have done. Therefore let Major John J. Key, be forthwith dismissed from the Military service of the United States.”

Letter from Abraham Lincoln to Major John J. Key, September 26, 1862.  
(Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC00228.01)

General Orders No. 144 of September 27, 1862, dismissing Key from the service for uttering disloyal sentiments.  
(Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC00228.01)

GENERAL ORDERS, }  
No. 144. }  
WAR DEPARTMENT,  
ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE,  
Washington, Sept. 27, 1862.

By direction of the President, Major *John J. Key*, Additional Aide-de-Camp, U. S. Service, is hereby dismissed for uttering disloyal sentiments.

BY ORDER OF THE SECRETARY OF WAR:

L. THOMAS,  
*Adjutant General.*

OFFICIAL:

*E. D. Townsend*  
*Assistant Adjutant General.*

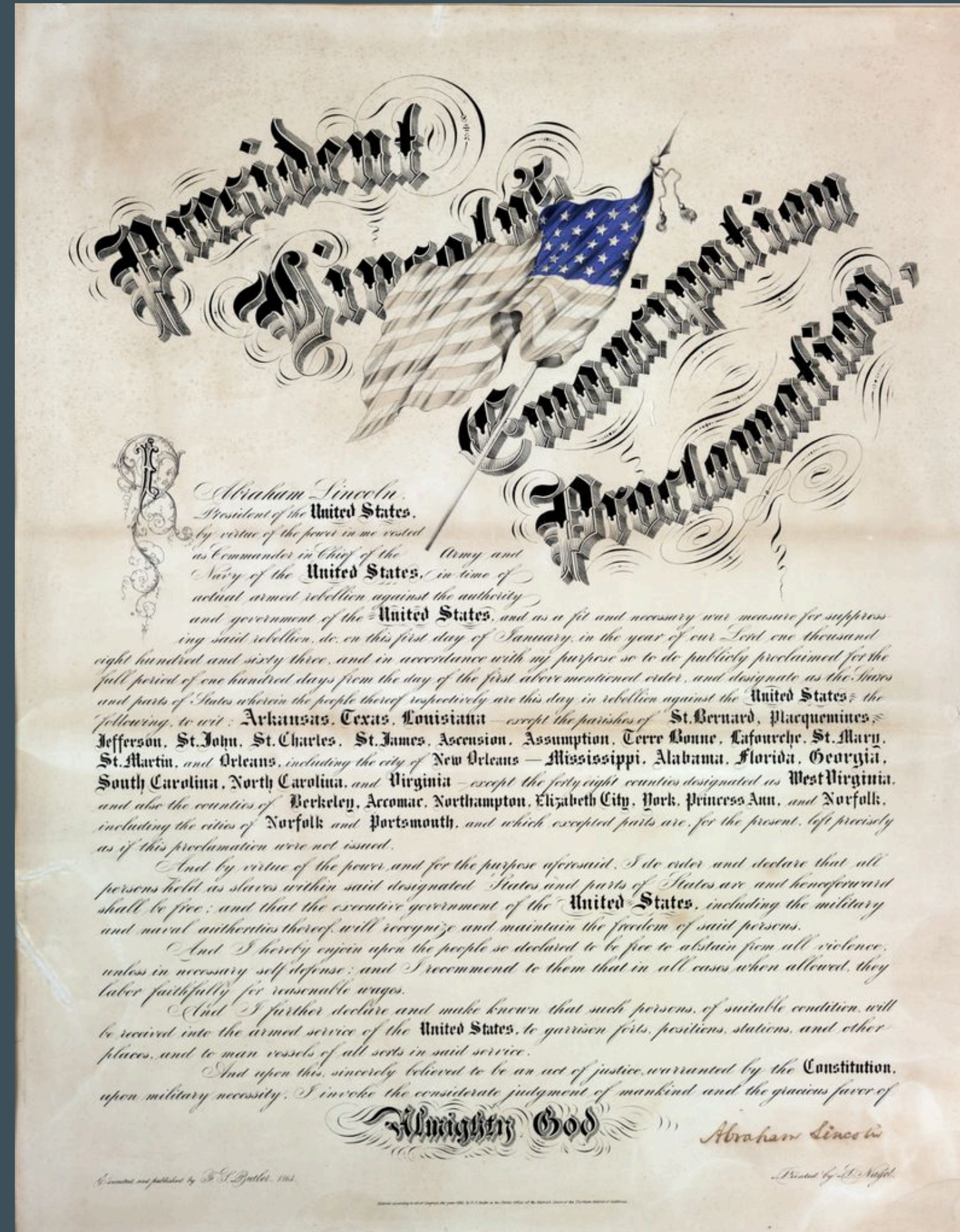


# Additional Resources



- Gilder Lehrman Institute
- Electing the House of Representatives
- Electing the President
- Valley of the Shadow
- Southern Journey.





Emancipation Proclamation, written by Abraham Lincoln, January 1, 1863.  
(Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC00742)



# Upcoming Programs

## INSIDE THE VAULT:

October 2 at 7 p.m. ET (4 p.m. PT)

- *The American Anti-Slavery Almanac* for 1839, with Dr. Nikki Taylor, Professor of History, Howard University

November 6 at 7 p.m. ET (4 p.m. PT)

- The Gettysburg Address, with Dr. Jonathan White, Professor of American Studies, Christopher Newport University

BOOK BREAKS: September 7 at 2 p.m. ET (11 a.m. PT)

- Michael Vorenburg will discuss his book *Lincoln's Peace: The Struggle to End the American Civil War*.

