

## ***THE WHITE HOUSE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION***

***Classroom: Grades 9-12***

***President and War Powers: "Lincoln and the Civil War"***

### ***Activity - Father Abraham***

David Herbert Donald in *Lincoln* describes the scene on April 4, 1865, when President Lincoln went to visit the former Confederate capital, Richmond. Landing without fanfare from a barge on the James River, he was first noticed by some black workmen, undoubtedly freed slaves. Donald notes that:

Their leader, a man about sixty, dropped his spade and rushed forward, exclaiming, "Bless the Lord, there is the great Messiah! . . . Glory, Hallelujah!" He and others fell on their knees, trying to kiss the President's feet. "Don't kneel to me," Lincoln told them, embarrassed. "That is not right. You must kneel to God only, and thank him for the liberty you will hereafter enjoy." Quickly word of the President's arrival spread, and he was soon surrounded by throngs of blacks, who shouted, "Bless the Lord, Father Abraham come."<sup>7</sup>

You can imagine that almost all the freed slaves revered Abraham Lincoln. Most likely the finer points of constitutionally sanctioned emancipation were not on their minds that spring of 1865. They were free, and it was a time of rejoicing. Perhaps they had not heard the news that slaves in some border states were not free at all, or that the Emancipation Proclamation was a war measure of limited scope and might be questioned now that the war was now coming to a close.

Because of the magnitude of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, the whole story of how all slaves were freed is not often told, even today. Many people believe that Lincoln freed all of the slaves when he issued the Emancipation Proclamation, January 1, 1863. In the Student Text Lincoln's complex beliefs about emancipation are discussed. Suppose you had to explain his views to an eight-year-old who was studying about President Lincoln as part of a President's Day project.

### ***Activity:***

Work with four or five of your classmates to write a children's book about Abraham Lincoln and slavery. The idea of the book is threefold:

1. To accurately explain Lincoln's views on abolishing slavery, the extent of his role in freeing the slaves, and the process by which all slaves were eventually freed.

2. To emphasize that even though he did not free all the slaves, the Emancipation Proclamation represented an important and inspirational first step toward abolishing that institution.
3. To help young students understand that even though Lincoln did not free all slaves outright, he believed that slavery was morally wrong and had to end.

Print the text of your book, using a large child-friendly font. Make a colorful, inviting cover, and have one of your group members illustrate the story. If possible, laminate the pages so the book has a more professional look. Ask your teacher to read each groups' story and determine which one is most accurate and appealing. Give it the true test of readability—try it out on your kid sister or brother!