Emancipation 1861 to 1863

1st Place, Best Lesson Plan Contest 2011-2012

By Karen Richey

Tracing shifts in public opinion from 1861 to 1863

Grade Level: Middle School and High School

Approximate length of time: The lesson can be conducted in two to three class periods; one to two days for document analysis and an additional day for completing the writing task.

Goals:

Students will gain an understanding of how ideas about emancipation evolved as the American Civil War entered its second year.

Objectives:

Students will be able to discuss how opinions (as reflected in articles from the Sacramento Bee and the Sacramento Daily Union) regarding emancipation changed from 1861 when the American Civil War began, to 1863 when the Emancipation Proclamation took effect.

Materials Used:

All materials used can be downloaded with the lesson plan on the right side of the page.

Historical Context

Key Terms

Sacramento Bee primary source documents A-F

Primary source analysis questions

Writing task grading rubric

Guiding Question:

How did Sacramentans' opinions about emancipation change from 1861 to 1863?

Procedure:

Vocabulary Development
A list of key terms has been provided. Guide students in a careful reading of each
document. Students should first use context clues as they read to discover the meaning of
important words and phrases. Students may also use classroom resources such as a dictionary, a
thesaurus, or their textbook to define important terms.

**Document Analysis and Discussion**

Students read each document independently and attempt to answer the questions that follow. The
analysis (and a second read-through) can be done in pairs, within small groups or as a whole-
class activity. The teacher should closely monitor student understanding and continuously return
to the guiding question, ‘How did Sacramentans’ opinions about emancipation change from
1861 to 1863?’

**Assessment**

Students write a paragraph explaining how opinions about emancipation changed from 1861 to
1863 when the Emancipation Proclamation took effect. In order to successfully complete the
task, students must use a citation from Document A and compare it to a citation from at least two
of the other documents. A suggested rubric follows the documents.

**Modifications:**

Write a newspaper article, journal entry, or letter describing Sacramento’s Emancipation
celebrations. Write from the perspective of someone living at the time.
**Historical Context**

According to the 1860 census, San Francisco and Sacramento counties contained almost one-third of California’s African American population, yet fewer than 500 African Americans lived in Sacramento at this time.\(^1\) One will not find the voices or opinions of the African American community represented in either of Sacramento’s daily newspapers. The newspapers’ coverage of emancipation centered on its impact upon the war, not about the individual men and women affected. “Colored residents” are mentioned; newspapers reported that the colored residents celebrated emancipation, a colored military company was organized in San Francisco, but these residents were never identified by name.\(^2\)

Historians now agree that slavery was a primary cause of the war. Emancipation, however, was not a primary goal of most of the loyal white citizens when the war began. Preserving the union and maintaining a democratic republic were the reasons most Union men gave for fighting in 1861.\(^3\) In the fall of that year, the *Sacramento Union* noted that abolitionists who anticipated the end of slavery “as one of the consequences of this rebellion…are doomed to disappointment.”\(^4\) There was considerable public debate about the United States’ policy toward slaves as Union commanders moved into Confederate territory and slaves left their masters for the safety of Union lines. Questions of constitutionality and the original goals of the war were overridden by the immediate question of what the government’s policy should be toward these individuals christened “contrabands” of war by Union General Benjamin Butler. As the war progressed, Unionists began to see emancipation as both of tool for winning the war and a necessary step in ensuring the future survival of the Union. The evolution in Unionists’ thinking regarding emancipation can be traced through the newspapers’ coverage of slavery, emancipation, and the enrollment of African American soldiers in the Union army.

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\(^4\) *Sacramento Daily Union*, October 5, 1861, page 2, column 2.
### Key Terms

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<td>abolition</td>
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<td>subjugate</td>
<td>annihilate</td>
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<td>military necessity</td>
<td>“pregnant with consequences”</td>
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<td>Secessionists</td>
<td>treason</td>
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Focus Activity

Use the following excerpts from an article in the Sacramento Daily Union to engage students’ interest in the topic of emancipation. The article makes some provocative statements that should generate discussion.

Document A

We assume that the total abolition of African slavery in the United States is socially and physically an impossibility. Its attempt would result in the annihilation of the black race. The two races cannot live together upon terms of equality, and as a natural and inevitable consequence, the superior would subjugate, reduce the inferior again to slavery, or totally annihilate it. To liberate four millions of ignorant and half-civilized negroes among those who formerly owned them, could not terminate otherwise than in a war of extermination. To remove them from the coun-

Therefore, those who anticipate the abolition of slavery as one of the consequences of this rebellion, if there are any such in the country, are, in our judgment, doomed to disappointment. It may, and probably will, result in the total destruction of the political power of slavery in the United States. It will never again rise to a position, as a political element, which will enable it, as in times past, to control and direct the policy and destiny of the nation.

source: Sacramento Daily Union, October 5, 1861

Help the students analyze Document A using the following questions:

1. What strong descriptive words are used in the source?
2. When and where was the source written or produced?
3. What type of document is this?
4. Is this source a primary or secondary source?
5. What was different about this time from ours?
6. Who is the intended audience of the source?
7. What are the Sacramento Union editors’ opinions about emancipation in 1861?
Task
Students will analyze each of the following documents and compare them with Document A. Each document will be examined for evidence of how white citizens’ opinions about emancipation changed from 1861 to 1863.

Document B

source: Sacramento Daily Union, May 19, 1862
Document B: Analysis Questions

1. When and where was the source written or produced?
2. What type of document is this?
3. Is this source a primary or secondary source?
4. What was different about this time from ours?
5. Who is the intended audience of the source?
6. How is this source different from Document A?
7. Why might the length of the war determine the fate of slavery in the United States?
8. What opinions regarding emancipation do the Union’s editors express in May of 1862? How can you use this source to answer the question, “How did Sacramentans’ opinions about emancipation change from 1861 to 1863?”
The main feature of the news by telegraph from the East is the proclamation by President Lincoln. Sixteen months after the inauguration of the rebellion, while the sound of the enemy’s cannon is heard in the vicinity of the National Capital, and the rebels are exultingly proclaiming that the institution of slavery is the chief support of the revolutionary movement, the decree is issued, in the exercise of the war power, which makes the penalty of persistence in treason the abolition of slavery. In addition to this announcement, we have the assurance that the Confiscation law is to be fully enforced, and a strict compliance with the new article of war, forbidding the return of fugitive slaves to their masters by persons in the military and naval service of the United States, will be required. If aught had been needed to

source: Sacramento Daily Union, September 24, 1862

Document C: Analysis Questions

1. When and where was the source written or produced?
2. What type of documents is this?
3. Is this source a primary or secondary source?
4. What was different about this time from ours?
5. Who is the intended audience of the source?
6. How is this source different from Documents A and B?
7. What opinions regarding emancipation do the Union’s editors express in September of 1862? How can you use this source to answer the question, “How did Sacramentans’ opinions about emancipation change from 1861 to 1863?”
Document D

source: *Sacramento Daily Union*, December 29, 1862

**Document D: Analysis Questions**

1. When and where was the source written or produced?
2. What type of document is this?
3. Is this source a primary or secondary source?
4. What was different about this time from ours?
5. Who is the intended audience of the source?
6. How is this source different from the other sources?
7. How can you use this source to answer the question, “How did Sacramentans’ opinions about emancipation change from 1861 to 1863?”
Document E: Analysis Questions

1. When and where was the source written or produced?
2. What type of document is this?
3. Is this source a primary or secondary source?
4. What was different about this time from ours?
5. Who is the intended audience of the source?
6. How is this source different from Document A?
7. What opinions regarding emancipation do the Union’s editors express in January of 1863? How can you use this source to answer the question, “How did Sacramentans’ opinions about emancipation change from 1861 to 1863?”
Document F

CHEERING THE PROCLAMATION—On Saturday night, when the crowd of residents and strangers who were waiting in the reading room of the Orleans for the extra had learned its contents a F.F. Fargo arose and proposed three cheers for the proclamation. They were given with huzzas of joy, which welled up loudly from the public heart, the finest chords of which had been so delicately yet so powerfully touched. In two minutes thereafter we heard a young man, who is a stranger here, say in private conversation to a friend, “What a change! If four years ago, any man had dared, in this room and in this crowd, to make such a proposition, he would have been kicked from the house and probably thrown from the river. Now every man rejoices at it – at least no one objects, and I did not see any who refused to cheer. And war has made all this change.” We may also state in this connection, that the colored population were deeply moved by it, and kept up their Saturday night’s rejoicings to a late-hour.in many places, observing the utmost decorum.

source: Sacramento Bee, January 5, 1863

Document F: Analysis Questions

1. When and where was the source written or produced?
2. What type of document is this?
3. Is this source a primary or secondary source?
4. What was different about this time from ours?
5. Who is the intended audience of the source?
6. How is this source different from Document A?
7. How can you use this source to answer the question, “How did Sacramentans’ opinions about emancipation change from 1861 to 1863?”
Writing Task

Write a paragraph describing how opinions about emancipation changed from 1861 when the American Civil War began to 1863 when the Emancipation Proclamation took effect. Use information from Document A as evidence of how Sacramento’s white citizens were thinking about emancipation in 1861. Then, use evidence from at least two other documents to show how thinking about emancipation changed as the war continued.

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Sources

Timeline of Events Related to Emancipation


Newspaper articles from the Sacramento Bee and Sacramento Union come from the collections of the Center for Sacramento History. Senior Archivist Patricia Johnson supervised my research at the Center and gave me permission to use the articles in the lesson plan I am submitting.

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