

# The Emancipation Act and the Emancipation Proclamation

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## BRIEF OVERVIEW

This class session encourages students to engage with three primary documents: two legal documents and one a persuasive speech. Edward Henry Rollins' speech in favor of the Abolition Act was scanned from an original print copy in the Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library. The texts of the Emancipation Act and the Emancipation Proclamation are typed transcripts made available from the National Archives.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- **Characterize** the abolitionists' arguments against the institution of slavery.
- **Analyze** legal documents related to enslavement.
- **Identify and explain** the relationship between the values and rhetoric of the abolition movement and a contemporary social justice movement.

## BEFORE CLASS

- Have your students take a moment to [read the Rubenstein Library's How We Teach and Learn](#). It's very short, but includes things students will want to keep in mind as they work with primary sources now and in the future.
- Have your students read [Congressman Rollins' speech](#), the [District of Columbia Emancipation Act](#), and the [Emancipation Proclamation](#).

## SESSION OUTLINE

Students will work in pairs or small groups. Depending on the time available, the instructor may have them read the three documents and take a few notes prior to class. When class begins, break students into groups and identify one member to serve as the reporter.

### Activity I: The Rhetoric of Social Justice

Review [Congressman Rollins' speech](#). Make a list of his arguments in favor of abolishing slavery in Washington, D.C.

- Can you identify a current social movement that uses similar arguments to persuade people to support their cause?
- What are the similarities and differences between the abolitionist arguments and those of the current social movement you have identified?

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How did Rollins appeal to the "better angels" of his listeners?
- Are these still effective arguments today?
- What social justice movement(s) did you discuss?

## Activity II: Compare the Emancipation Act and the Emancipation Proclamation

Return to the small groups. Review the [District of Columbia Emancipation Act](#) and the [Emancipation Proclamation](#).

- Are financial resources pledged to facilitate the goal of freeing enslaved people? If so, how will the money be used?
- Do you notice any of the ideas expressed by Representative Rollins in the text of the Emancipation Act and/or the Emancipation Proclamation?
- If you could travel back in time to advise President Lincoln, what provisions would you recommend that he add to these documents?

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What surprised you about the differences between the two documents?
- What was left out?
- What questions about abolition and emancipation would you like to explore further?

### QUESTIONS?

[AskRL@duke.edu](mailto:AskRL@duke.edu)

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