



New York State Board of Regents
Dr. John B. King, Jr.
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**STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT ANNOUNCES EXHIBIT FEATURING
LINCOLN'S PRELIMINARY EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION
Exhibition to Travel Statewide to Mark 150th Anniversary**

The New York State Museum, a division of the New York State Education Department, will unveil a traveling exhibition to mark the sesquicentennial of Abraham Lincoln's Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York City on September 21. The exhibition, entitled *The First Step to Freedom: Abraham Lincoln's Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation*, will travel to eight cities across New York State this fall. The exhibition will offer an unprecedented display of the only surviving version of the document in Lincoln's handwriting and will include historical background and interpretation of the document. *The First Step to Freedom* will also include the manuscript of a speech written and delivered in New York City in September 1962 by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. for the Proclamation's centennial. While at the Schomburg Center, the Official Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, on exclusive loan from the National Archives, will also be exhibited. (The Proclamation didn't carry the force of law until after Lincoln's handwritten draft was transcribed, affixed with the Seal of the United States, and signed by the President.)

"America was born with the declaration that all men are created equal," State Education Commissioner John B. King, Jr. said, "but it took almost 100 years after our nation's founding -- until President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, the Union achieved victory and the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments were added to the U.S. Constitution -- to begin to make that declaration a reality for people of African descent brought here as slaves.

"Fifty years ago, commemorating the centennial of its signing, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke of the importance of the Emancipation Proclamation. He argued that the Emancipation Proclamation proved government could be a powerful force for social justice, but the promise of equality remained unfulfilled. And today, as we celebrate the 150th anniversary, the Proclamation is an important reminder that America is still a work in progress."

Commissioner King, who co-authored the exhibit text, noted the exhibition incorporates collections and images from the New York State Library and the New York State Archives. He said the documents stand as important markers in the path to freedom and equality for African Americans and are among New York State's greatest treasures.

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Lincoln's handwritten Preliminary Proclamation, issued one hundred fifty years ago in the midst of the Civil War, is the only surviving copy of this document in Lincoln's own handwriting. Lincoln donated it to the U.S. Sanitary Commission, which raffled the document at an Albany Army Relief Association Fair in 1864. It was later purchased by the New York State Legislature. Although Lincoln's handwritten final Emancipation Proclamation burned in the Chicago fire in 1871, the Preliminary Proclamation survived the State Capitol fire of 1911 and has been preserved by the State Library.

"As a milestone on the path to slavery's final abolishment, the Emancipation Proclamation has assumed a place among the great documents of human freedom. We are honored to share this official preliminary Proclamation in the *First Step to Freedom* celebration," said Archivist of the United States David S. Ferriero.

Dr. Khalil Muhammad, the Director of the Schomburg Center, and Harold Holzer, the award-winning Lincoln historian, co-authored the exhibit's text with Commissioner King.

"This 150th anniversary exhibition presents a very special occasion to bear witness to a transformative moment in American history," Dr. Muhammad said. "The Schomburg Center is proud to be the first stop on the *First Step to Freedom* tour. As the premiere institution for all things relating to Black history and culture, the Schomburg Center is honored to house these foundational documents for all of New York City to see."

"This unique freedom document did nothing less than change the Civil War--and change American history," Harold Holzer said. "In a very real way, this one-of-a-kind relic testifies not only to Lincoln's resolve to expand freedom, but New York's resolve to preserve it."

On September 12, 1962, civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered the speech contained in the exhibition to the New York State Civil War Centennial Commission.

The two documents--both in the collections of the New York State Education Department's Office of Cultural Education--will go on display for the first time together to mark the 150th anniversary of one of American history's defining moments. *The First Step to Freedom: Abraham Lincoln's Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation* exhibition was designed and developed by the New York State Museum using collections and images from the New York State Library and the New York State Archives. A website providing additional materials supporting the exhibition, including an iBook for download, will be available on September 20 at <http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/ep/>.

A related exhibit, *An Irrepressible Conflict: The Empire State in the Civil War*, commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Civil War, opens September 22 at the New York State Museum in Albany. This 6,500-square-foot exhibition chronicles the pivotal role New York State played in the war and will be open through September 22, 2013.

The First Step to Freedom: Abraham Lincoln's Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation

Exhibition Schedule

September 21 - 24	New York City	Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
September 27	Syracuse	The Oncenter (Host: Onondaga Historical Assn)
October 5 - 6	Buffalo	Burchfield Penney Art Center
October 15 – 6	Long Island	Tilles Center for the Performing Arts at LIU Post
October 19	Plattsburgh	Plattsburgh State Art Museum
October 27 - 28	Rochester	Rochester Museum and Science Center
November 1	Binghamton	Roberson Museum and Science Center
November 9 - 10	Albany	New York State Museum

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