

Contact: Annie Stone, 215-409-6687
astone@constitutioncenter.org

Merissa Blum, 215-409-6645
mblum@constitutioncenter.org

**CIVIL WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION EXHIBIT TO OPEN
AT THE NATIONAL CONSTITUTION CENTER**

Civil War and Reconstruction: The Battle for Freedom and Equality explores constitutional debates at the heart of the Second Founding, as well as the formation, passage, and impact of the Reconstruction Amendments

Philadelphia, PA (May 8, 2019) – Tomorrow, Thursday, May 9, the National Constitution Center’s new permanent exhibit ***Civil War and Reconstruction: The Battle for Freedom and Equality***—the first exhibit in America devoted to exploring how constitutional clashes over slavery set the stage for the Civil War, and how the nation transformed the Constitution after the war to more fully embrace the Declaration of Independence’s promise of liberty and equality—will open to the public.

“The National Constitution Center is thrilled to open the first permanent gallery in America that will tell the story of how the freedom and equality promised in the Declaration of Independence was thwarted in the original Constitution, resurrected by Lincoln at Gettysburg, and, after the bloodiest war in American history, finally enshrined in the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution,” said Jeffrey Rosen, President and CEO of the National Constitution Center. “It’s an honor for all of us at the Constitution Center to have worked on this permanent addition to the Center, which will educate visitors of all ages about what some have called America’s Second Founding and inspire them to learn more.”

Through remarkable artifacts and rare documents from one of the largest private Civil War collections in America—the Civil War Museum of Philadelphia—and other partners, the 3,000 square foot exhibit brings to life the stories of Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, Harriet Tubman, and other figures central to the conflict over slavery. The exhibit also features the inspiring stories of lesser known individuals to help shed light on the American experience under slavery, the battle for freedom during the Civil War, and the fight for equality during Reconstruction. In doing so, visitors will learn the history of three constitutional amendments added between 1865 and 1870, which ended slavery, required states to respect individual rights, promised equal protection to all people, and expanded the right to vote to African-American men.

Civil War and Reconstruction features over 100 artifacts, including original copies of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, Dred Scott’s signed petition for freedom, a pike purchased by John Brown for the armed raid at Harper’s Ferry to incite a revolt against slavery, a fragment of the flag that Abraham Lincoln raised at Independence Hall in Philadelphia in 1861, and a ballot box marked “colored” from Virginia’s first statewide election that allowed black men to vote in 1867.

As part of the opening events surrounding *Civil War and Reconstruction*, [Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr. joined President and CEO Jeffrey Rosen for a special program](#) and opening ceremony on Tuesday, May 7.

“Reconstruction is finally having its moment in the sun,” said famed scholar and filmmaker, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., executive producer and host of the recent documentary series for PBS *Reconstruction: America After the Civil War*, and author of the recently published books *Stony the Road: Reconstruction, White Supremacy, and the Rise of Jim Crow* (Penguin Press) and *Dark Sky Rising: Reconstruction and the Dawn of Jim Crow* (Scholastic Focus). “This defining and dark era in our nation’s history has been undertaught in our schools and misunderstood in our society for more than a century. But thanks to marvelous institutions such as the National Constitution Center, America’s first experiment with interracial democracy will never be lost again. This exhibit is a stunningly compelling example of how our great cultural institutions can help us learn from—and reconcile with—our troubled past.”

The National Constitution Center is celebrating the new gallery opening Thursday, May 9, through Sunday, May 12, with “Artifact Spotlight Talks,” where education staff will discuss some of the most interesting pieces of the exhibit; a Civil War encampment; dress-up and photo opportunities; meet-and-greets with “historic figures;” and more.

Along with other multimedia elements, the exhibit uses interactive technology to encourage visitors to explore the creation and drafting of each of the three Reconstruction Amendments. Through an original gallery interactive created to teach the drafting process of each amendment’s text, visitors can explore the key stories, figures, and ideas behind the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, examine the events that shaped each amendment, and compare the evolution of text within each amendment. These interactives are also designed to complement the Center’s upgraded online *Interactive Constitution* and *Drafting Table* learning tools which will launch in the fall.

As visitors explore *Civil War and Reconstruction*, they will encounter a short, theatrical performance in the 14th Amendment section of the exhibit highlighting Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, a key African-American figure from the Reconstruction era. Performances will run two times an hour between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., Mondays through Saturdays, May 9 through Memorial Day Weekend 2019, and be available on select dates throughout fall of 2019 and in February 2020.

Civil War and Reconstruction is a permanent addition to the National Constitution Center’s main exhibit experience. Located on the ground floor, this new permanent gallery is adjacent to the *American Treasures* gallery, which features the five rarest original drafts of the Constitution. Together, these two exhibits will ensure that the most significant original documents from America’s founding and from the Reconstruction era—which some have called the Second Founding—can educate and inspire visitors in perpetuity.

Artifacts in *Civil War and Reconstruction* have been generously lent to the National Constitution Center through a partnership among the Center, the Civil War Museum of Philadelphia, and the Gettysburg Foundation. The Civil War Museum formally transferred ownership of its three-dimensional artifacts to the Gettysburg Foundation in 2016 on the condition that a selection be permanently displayed in Philadelphia at the National Constitution Center. The exhibit also brings together artifacts from a wide range of institutions across the country, from Illinois, Louisiana, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, and Washington, D.C.

Civil War and Reconstruction: The Battle for Freedom and Equality has been generously supported by The George Family Foundation; Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation; The Pew Charitable Trusts; the William Penn Foundation; PECO; Crystal Trust; The McLean Contributionship; Otto Haas Charitable Trust, at the recommendation of John and Janet Haas; the Board of Governors of the Civil War Museum

of Philadelphia; Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Tourism Office; Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development; Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program of the Commonwealth. The theatre programs in conjunction with *Civil War and Reconstruction* are supported by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage.

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About the National Constitution Center

The [National Constitution Center](https://www.constitutioncenter.org/) in Philadelphia brings together people of all ages and perspectives, across America and around the world, to learn about, debate, and celebrate the greatest vision of human freedom in history, the U.S. Constitution. A private, nonprofit organization, the Center serves as America's leading platform for constitutional education and debate, fulfilling its congressional charter "to disseminate information about the U.S. Constitution on a nonpartisan basis." As the **Museum of We the People**, the Center brings the Constitution to life for visitors of all ages through interactive programs and exhibits. As **America's Town Hall**, the Center brings the leading conservative and liberal thought leaders together to debate the Constitution on all media platforms. As a **Headquarters for Civic Education**, the Center delivers the best educational programs and online resources that inspire citizens and engage all Americans in learning about the U.S. Constitution. For more information, call 215-409-6700 or visit [constitutioncenter.org](https://www.constitutioncenter.org).