INTRODUCTION
The black man has been in the United States for nearly as long as the white man. Barely a couple of decades separate the establishment of the first colonies in America and the importation of black slaves. It is not possible to give an accurate figure of the number of slaves imported into the New World from Africa, but conservative estimates put it at a total of 15 million for the entire period of slave importation spanning some three centuries. Considering the millions who died in the cramped holds of the ships in the "Middle Passage" over the Atlantic, the number of blacks uprooted from Africa may well have run into 30 to 50 million.

The travails of the black people who survived the horrors of the "Middle Passage" to spend their lives in ignominious servitude even as their labours contributed to the taming of a continent have been inadequately chronicled in most works by white historians. That there might have been an independent intellectual component with a vibrancy of its own among the slaves in the plantations and suppressed communities of free blacks was hardly recognized in most of those writings and yet there was indeed, right from the outset, a profound concern among the blacks on the state to which they had been reduced, their place in the society into which they had been cast and the actions that they should take to prevent their physical annihilation and the total submergence of their racial uniqueness as blacks. The present generation in the U.S. as well as in our own country recognizes these sentiments as having
been firmly held and proclaimed during the Civil Rights Movement of recent years. In the present work, the focus is on a much earlier, profoundly significant period in American history and of the blacks when similar concepts were put forth and debated with passion and skill by black men. The debate raged while the environment in the country was most unpropitious. The present writer's hope that this modest work may bring home to readers, at least in a small way, the historic continuity in the saga of an oppressed group in struggle for dignity and equality—a struggle which, despite progress in recent years, still remains unfinished.

The present study is concerned with developments in the nineteenth century, principally in the critical decades culminating in President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in the middle of the Civil War in 1863. For more reasons than one, the Civil War is regarded as a period of striking discontinuity in the otherwise headlong march of the American Republic to the position of a great world-power in the present century. For one thing it resulted in the emancipation of 4½ million black men held as slaves. We will show that this act was not the outcome of any great social movement towards that end, but, was as its protagonists viewed it, purely a war measure. There were brave individuals, both white and black who had struggled long and arduously for the emancipation as well. In the period of our study, it must be pointed out that this abolitionist movement had more or less petered out and replaced by an anti-Southern movement
spearheaded by the Republican Party. The stakes involved were the control of a national government and the employment of its powers by and for the benefit of powerful economic groups that saw in the social turmoil of the time and the intense emotionalism that it generated, an opportunity to displace the long dominance of Southern agrarians and their allies. These elements saw in the Republican Party a political instrument for the promotion of this objective. While for the political objective of bringing down Southern agrarian dominance they indulged in strident denunciation of the "peculiar institution" of the South, they were neither committed to abolition of slavery or even to ending the acute discrimination against free blacks that was the norm in the North. They were essentially white American nationalists who held the vision of a white nation astride the continent, making rapid strides in economic and industrial development so that America could take its place along side the great powers of Europe.

The white nationalism that gripped the North also sharpened the anti-black attitudes of that region. This is evident from the attitudes of various Northern intellectuals, politicians and publicists towards the blacks before and after their emancipation. The years 1863 to 1876 were the only years, till the Civil Rights Act of 1964, in which a measure of political equality came to be conferred upon the blacks. After that period, under severe attack from the racists, with very few allies, the blacks were unable to turn back what was essentially a relapse of a national policy to keep them in a position of economic, social
and political subordination.

Much has been written about the subject discussed above. Indeed black scholars and some whites were never silent on the iniquities heaped upon the blacks. However, we have attempted to focus on the way in which the black people themselves approached freedom. We have outlined the black response to the prevailing ethos in which the white race was declared biologically superior to the non-white races, and eminent men sought explanations of the movement of human history in terms of racial traits.

However, the major focus of our study is the manner in which blacks sought to define their presence in America as well as their response to the issues and events of the turbulent decade that ended in their emancipation. The format of the debate had a startlingly contemporary ring. A significant section of the antecedent black leadership veered around to the idea that the only way in which the black race could retain its shattered identity and self-respect was by migrating to either Central America, the Caribbean or Africa and founding a black nation which would forever put to rest doubts about the black man's alleged inferiority. Another section of the black leadership, aware of the difficulties of such an enterprise, and heartened by the increasingly cohesive and articulate free black community emerging, especially in Northern cities, opposed this act which they felt would amount to a Diaspora. They argued that given the historic contribution of the blacks to the country, though an involuntary one, justified black demands to be
considered citizens of the country at par with the whites.

The onset of the Civil War brought many of the issues agitating the black community to a head. However, the war was viewed by most blacks as the harbinger of freedom. The hopes of the blacks were not belied: while almost all white observers of the period were united in the perception, or wishful thinking, that the war was concerned only with the preservation of the Union, blacks themselves, especially the long-silent slaves set about a chain reaction that compelled the North to eventually fight the war as a battle of liberation.

The present writer has chosen to end the thesis at the point the Emancipation Proclamation was issued. The reasons for this are not difficult to explain. At the outset we had attempted to look at the debate around the place of blacks in American society. By the time the Proclamation was issued, much of the debate was stilled, at least for the period. Black national-emigrationists who had initially tended to ignore the conflict, joined the rest of the black community in fighting for black rights within the United States, and, from 1863 onwards, took an active part in recruiting black troops to fight for the American Union. Secondly, President Lincoln, who had at first sought to keep the blacks out of all issues relating to the war, and then attempted to make them leave the country, issued the Emancipation Proclamation that has made him famous. This Proclamation finally decided the issue of the place of blacks in American society as far as the whites were concerned—that blacks were to stay in America for good. Within two years of this,
some five years after the Republican Party had proposed a constitutional amendment to make slavery perpetual to placate the South, the Thirteenth Amendment guaranteeing black freedom was incorporated in the Constitution.

At the outset it must be stated that the first chapter, which outlines the various aspects of white racial thought, is meant to be an introductory exercise. Similarly, the chapter on the attitudes and policies of the Republican Party attempts to provide a description of events over which the debate within the black community and in the nation took place. The focus of the study is to outline a black self-perception of the period so crucial to the history of both the blacks and the United States of America.

The study suffers from serious shortfalls. Some are the product of the writer's own deficiencies but some arise out of the nature of the topic and the location of the writer. Furthermore it must be pointed out that the major portion of the work was done with the help of resources available in India, particularly those at the American Studies Research Centre, Hyderabad. The brief field-trip to the U.S. was useful in another way.

The writer, after discussion with several American scholars, came to the conclusion that is an extreme vacuity of material, published or otherwise, on blacks, written by blacks in the United States of America.
libraries and archives of the U.S., at least for the antebellum period. It must be pointed out that there were only about 500,000 free blacks in the U.S. at that time the others numbering some 4,500,000 were slaves. Of these, only 250,000 resided in the relatively freer environment of the North where some form of intellectual and political activity was permitted.