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The Impatience of the Saints: The Abolitionists' Frustration with Lincoln's Movement toward Emancipation

Eddie E. Vargas

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By

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"Viewed from a genuine abolition ground, Mr. Lincoln seemed tardy, cold, dull and indifferent; but measuring him by the sentiment of his country, a sentiment he was bound as a statesman to consult, he was swift, zealous, radical, and determined . . .."

Frederick Douglass, April 14, 1876

Table of Contents

Introduction

In the bloody Civil War years, we behold our nation with horror. We see a country riven by issues of color and sectional pride; we see the fires of anger and hate fueled by headstrong constitutional arguments; we see our country brought to near ruin by forces of its own devising; and in the chaos of conflict, we see juxtaposed blunder and heroism, desperation and prudence, the dastardly, the admirable and the downright perplexing.

One of the most confusing aspects of this era of war was Abraham Lincoln's attitude toward the enshackled Negro. Every schoolboy knows that Lincoln disliked slavery, but many do not realize that he was reluctant to free the slaves. In 1862, Lincoln wrote Horace Greeley a letter, which was published in the *New York Tribune* as his official stand on the aims of the war and slavery. "My paramount object in this struggle *is* to save the Union, and is *not* either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing *any* slave I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing *all* the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that."[1] History demonstrates that it was through solemn deliberation and an eventual realization that the Union could not survive with slavery intact that Lincoln finally granted the Negro his freedom.

On the other hand, by the time the Civil War began, the abolitionists had been fighting for over thirty years on behalf of the Negro. Their newspapers vigorously defended the Negro's right to dignity and compensated labor. Tirelessly and at great danger to themselves, they preached compassion for the Negro and appealed for political reform in houses, churches, halls and auditoriums. Moreover, from the very outset of the war, the abolitionists clamored for slave

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[1] *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 9 vols., ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55), vol. 5:388-89. Hereafter cited as *CWL*.

emancipation arguing from constitutional grounds that slaves were property and could therefore be confiscated by the North. Nevertheless, it seems they could not make an impression on Lincoln. He seemed disinterested in emancipation and distracted by other matters of war. Was slavery not a key issue in the war?

Even though slavery was presented as a peripheral subject by both the North and the South, it was actually at the heart of the conflict. The South's way of life and economy, an economy which depended on the African slave, was perceived to be at risk by the radical North. Alexander Stephens (a close friend of Lincoln and Georgian congressman who became Vice President of the Confederacy) said in response to radical Northern notions of equality that the Confederacy is "founded upon exactly the opposite idea; *its foundations are laid, its cornerstone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man*; that slavery, subordination to the superior race, is his natural and normal condition. *This, our new government, is the first, in the history of the world, based on this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth.*"[2]

On January 1, 1863, the abolitionist hopes were finally realized with the passage of the Emancipation Proclamation. Lincoln did what these groups were urging him to do all along when he published the Proclamation. But why did it take Lincoln almost two years of violent southern secession before he issued his famous edict. Why did Lincoln move so slowly in leading the march toward emancipation? Did the abolitionists finally convince Lincoln? Why did Lincoln not listen to the abolitionists earlier? Why did Lincoln not make emancipation more of a priority? The Civil War saga reveals a tension between the Emancipator and the emancipationists. Both wanted an end to slavery, but the question was: "When?"

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[2] Howard Jones, *Abraham Lincoln and a New Birth of Freedom,* (University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 35.

Part One: Abolitionists in 1860

The Abolitionism in 1860

Even though there was a whole gamut of personalities that influenced ante-bellum America, William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass represent the two major groups that were active in 1860.[3]

William Lloyd Garrison was supported by the talented Wendell Phillips, Parker Pillsbury, Oliver Johnson, Abby and Stephen S. Foster, Robert Purvis and several strong, gifted women such as Susan B. Anthony, Lucretia Mott, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Their primary organization was the American Anti-slavery society, which was founded by Garrison and others in Philadelphia in 1833. Their leading publication was *The Liberator* and the city of their greatest activity was Boston, Massachusetts. New England Quaker culture had a profound influence on this group, particularly its penchant for pacifism.[4] An understanding this group's views is best achieved by becoming familiar with its emblematic leader—William Lloyd Garrison.

Garrison was profoundly influenced by abolitionist Benjamin Lundy, founder of the Union Humane Society and the newspaper *Genius of Universal Emancipation,* when they met in New England, in1828. Two years later, while spending forty-nine days in jail for libel, Garrison began writing about "immediate emancipation." Two brothers, wealthy Massachusetts

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[3] A third group exists which is almost impossible to define but includes Northerners who believed that emancipation should be immediate and uncompensated. Accordingly, they can be considered true abolitionists. Those in this group were generally outsiders and often worked alone, nevertheless, they were outspoken and faithful. Henry B. Stanton, Joshua Leavitt and Elizur Wright who worked within the Republican Party are part of this group.

[4] William Lloyd Garrison, Lucretia Coffin Mott, Benjamin Lundy, and Angelina Emily Grimke (who joined the Quakers, for a time, through the influence of Sarah, her sister) were raised in Quaker households.

merchants and abolitionist sympathizers, Arthur and Lewis Tappan, put up his bail and provided funding for the *Liberator,* of which Garrison was editor-in-chief until it was discontinued in 1865. Immediate, uncompensated emancipation now had a vital organ and an energetic and devoted editor to disseminate its views.

Garrison represented the most radical segment of abolitionism. His call for "immediate" emancipation was fanatical at a time when gradualists were considered radical. Furthermore, he rejected male supremacy and advocated women's rights.[5] Garrison also adopted, Wendell Phillip's notion that the Constitution was a corrupt document because its language allowed for the perpetuation of slavery. On July 4th, 1854, Garrison burned the American Constitution and called for Northern secession. The front-page superscription of *The Liberator* read "The U.S. Constitution is a 'covenant with death and an agreement with hell!'" until it was changed to "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land, to all the inhabitants thereof" on December 13, 1861.


William Lloyd Garrison

Garrison and the American Anti-Slavery Society's chief early tactics early on were "moral suasion" and non-violence. Moral suasion, operated under the assumption that man must be regenerated through education; he must be taught to love the good. Garrisonians posited that through moral suasion the will to abolish slavery would spring up in the heart of the slaveholding south. Moral suasion calls for awakening the churches to the immorality of slavery, publicizing the evils of slavery, and non-cooperation (refusal to vote and hold office). Garrison wrote, "We cordially accept the non-resistance principle; being confident that it provides for all possible

[5] Garrison's extremism, especially his embrace of women's rights, created division among abolitionists, most notably the American Anti-Slavery Society schism of 1840, wherein the Tappan brothers withdrew their support and founded the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. Others left to form the Liberty Party.

consequences, will ensure all things needful to us, is armed with omnipotent power, and must ultimately triumph over every assailing force."[6] Moral suasion, however, as a cure-all tactic did not last long. In 1840, Garrison wrote that moral suasion is not effective on the masses but only on "individual cases."[7] These "individual cases" he hoped would be the political leadership at Washington. By the time the south seceded, Garrison argued that non-resistance is impractical in the context of war.[8] Nevertheless, Garrisonians did not welcome militancy or political infiltration.

The second abolitionist group consisted largely of those who split with Garrison in the American Anti-slavery schism of 1840. This group rejected Garrison's extremism and willingly cooperated with the government to achieve their objectives. These "political abolitionists" joined political parties, voted and work within the political system. They believed it was the government's duty to end slavery. Some went on to join the radicals of the Republican Party in the 1850's, while others chose to retain their distinctly abolitionist image and formed the Liberty party. By 1860, the Liberty Party had become the Radical Abolitionist party, and its leaders were Gerrit Smith, William Goodell and Frederick Douglass. The Church Anti-Slavery Society, founded by the Congregationalist minister Henry Cheever worked closely with this party as well as the American Missionary Association (instrumental in created an educational system that could further abolitionism) led by Lewis Tappan, George Whipple and Simeon S. Jocelyn. Evangelical Protestantism influenced this group greatly, especially the black abolitionists.[9] All of the blacks in the American and Foreign Anti-slavery society were clergymen, and most

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[6] *Liberator*, Sept. 28, 1838.
[7] Quoted in Gerald Sorin. *Abolitionism: A New Perspective,* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 57.
[8] *Liberator*, June 14, 1861.
[9] The late historian Gilbert H. Barnes actually attributes the origins of the abolition movement to the evangelical revivals of western Pennsylvania, New York and Ohio and the minister Charles Grandison Finney. Out of this movement came some of the most solid bulwarks of abolitionism—the Tappan brothers and Theodore Weld. For more information peruse Richard O. Curry, *The Abolitionists: Reformers or Fanatics.* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965).

subscribed to a form of the social gospel which included the idea that sin (including slavery) was keeping back the Millennium of peace. The major publication for this second camp of abolitionists was Frederick Douglass' newspaper which took on different titles (*Frederick Douglass Paper, Douglass Monthly*) and the center of their activities was upstate New York. Frederick Douglass, a former Negro slave, was its most prominent leader and contributed heavily to its philosophy, most notably, its support of militancy.

Before 1850 Frederick Douglass had been a pacifist. "Were I asked the question whether I would have my emancipation by the shedding of one single drop of blood, my answer would be in the negative . . . . The only well grounded hope of the slave for emancipation is the operation of moral force," commented Douglass.[10] However, the passing of the Fugitive Slave Law, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and the Dred Scott Decision pushed him and scores of others toward militancy. This is evinced by his support of John Brown's raid of which he remarked afterward, "Posterity will owe everlasting thanks to John Brown. Slavery is a system of brute force. It must be met with its own weapons. John Brown has initiated a new mode of carrying on the crusade of freedom." [11] A month after the fugitive slave law Douglass wrote, "Slave-holders . . . tyrants and despots have no right to live" and a favorite saying of Douglass was, "who would be free must himself strike the blow."[12]

Contentions among the Abolitionist Groups

Relations within the abolitionist camp were sometimes angrily inharmonious. Nothing

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[10] Quoted in James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 203.
[11] Quoted in *Civil War Journal: Leaders*, 173.
[12] Quoted in McPherson. *Battle Cry*, 203; Gerrit Smith also submitted to the doctrine of violence under the unbearable pressure of the circumstances. He became a member of the "secret six" who helped John Brown plan his raid at Harper's Ferry. Furthermore, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, another former pacifist abolitionist, commented in the *Liberator* (May 28, 1858) that slavery "is destined, as it began, to end in blood."

illustrates this better than the relationship between Garrison and Douglass. After touring and lecturing together in the 1840's, Douglass began publishing his own paper and disregarded Garrison's advice on many issues. Garrison's injured pride was further irritated in 1851 when Douglass announced himself a voting abolitionist. Garrison had heretofore denounced the government as a corrupt institution and encouraged abolitionists to eschew involvement in it.

Another area of friction was Garrison's subtle disbelief in the aptitude of the Negro to contribute to the cause of emancipation. The heated editorial exchanges between him and Douglass on this issue was reprinted in the *Liberator*. The argument began after Garrison opined that "the Anti-Slavery cause both religiously and politically, has transcended the ability of the sufferers from American slavery and prejudice, *as a class*, to keep pace with it, or to perceive what are its demands, or to understand the philosophy of its operations." Douglass responded with fierce sarcasm: "The colored man ought to feel profoundly grateful for this magnificent compliment to their moral worth and breadth of comprehension, so generally bestowed by William Lloyd Garrison! Who will doubt, hereafter, the *natural* inferiority of the Negro, when the great champion of the Negroes' rights *thus broadly concedes all that is claimed respecting the Negro's inferiority by the bitterest despisers of the Negro race.*" In outrage, Garrison's retorted: "Now, if this were blundering stupidity, it might readily be pardoned; but it is unmitigated baseness, and therefore inexcusable." "Mr. Douglass presumes upon the color of his skin to vindicate his superior fidelity to that cause, and to screen himself from criticism and rebuke!"[13]

Frederick Douglass

Another source of friction among abolitionists, especially between black abolitionists and

[13] *Liberator,* December 16, 1853.

white abolitionists is what historian Gerald Sorin calls "paternalistic racism." Many white abolitionists saw themselves as superiors helping unshackle an inferior race. For them, it was a humanitarian endeavor springing out of pity and not a work intended to restore the Negro to his proper place beside the white man. Garrison seemed to share this bias since he repeatedly refused to promote talented blacks to prominent positions, favoring instead white leadership—however less qualified. Furthermore, the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1834 felt uncomfortable extending civil rights to blacks unless they could prove themselves of "intellectual and moral worth."[14] One abolitionist noted that white abolitionists "best loved the colored man at a distance."[15]

Although there were abolitionists of various persuasions and different emphases, they all shared the same fundamental belief that Negro enslavement was immoral, abominable and must be eradicated immediately. As we shall soon see, they also came to share an impatience and distrust in the Administration's move to remove that sin from the land.

Part Two: Lincoln's Views on Slavery

How did Lincoln's views compare with the abolitionists'? On the surface, his writings on slavery can be a baffling jumble of incongruent quotes and contradicting anecdotes. Much of the confusion is caused by the complexity of Lincoln's views. In brief, he considered slavery a social and moral wrong, but a political and constitutional right.

Lincoln's first encounter with slavery was shocking. It came in 1828 as he ran a business errand for his father in New Orleans. He was stunned by images of dejected and hopeless black bodies being sold into a life of condemnation and cruelty. As he matured, he identified with the

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[14] Gerald Sorin. *Abolitionism*, 108.
[15] Quoted in Gerald Sorin. *Abolitionism*, 108.

Whig party and shared their beliefs that President Polk had started the Mexican War and that the prohibition of slavery in newly acquired Mexican territory, as stated by the Wilmot Proviso was best for the country. As he became more involved in politics, particularly the Indiana legislature, his anti-slavery tendencies found more tangible expression such as his proposal of a bill that would facilitate the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia if its citizens consented. Nevertheless, "until the 1850's Lincoln joined many of his contemporaries in accepting slavery as an unavoidable evil that would eventually fade away if left alone"[16]. This was based on his concurrence with the popular theory that cotton would eventually rob the soil of its usefulness and put an end to efficiency of slavery.

However, in 1854 an event occurred that jolted all levels of American politics and spurred Lincoln back into the political stage. Senator Stephen A. Douglas' Kansas-Nebraska Act with its dangerous doctrine of "popular sovereignty" was passed, reversing the 1819 Missouri Compromise, which prohibited slavery north of the 36' 30" parallel.[17] The spread of slavery seemed to have no limits.

Stephen A. Douglas

Lincoln wrote that the passing of the Kansas-Nebraska Act "aroused" him "as he had never been before."[18] From 1854 onward, Lincoln's tune on the institution of slavery took a clearer more radical tone. In his famous speeches delivered at Bloomington and Peoria, Illinois

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[16] Howard Jones. *Abraham Lincoln and a New Birth of Freedom.* (University of Nebraska, 1999), 19.
[17] In 1818 when slaveholding Missouri applied for statehood there was a delicate balance of 11 free states and 11 slaves states in the Union. Admittance of Missouri would have created an imbalance favoring the South. The tension was relieved not long afterward when Maine, a free state, applied for statehood as well. The compromise, stipulated that Maine be admitted as a free state, Missouri as a slave state and that slavery be prohibited North of the 36' 30" parallel of the Louisiana Purchase. Henry Clay's dogged efforts helped it to barely pass, despite southern disgust at a permanent limitation on slavery territory.
[18] *CWL*, 4:67.

in late 1854, he spoke of the reproach slavery brought upon the nation. [19] Two years later, Lincoln engaged in his well-known bouts with Stephen A. Douglas in which he criticized the "little giant's" doctrine of popular sovereignty.

Like many others, Lincoln believed that the founding fathers in the Declaration of Independence (which proposed the universal rights of man) never intended to perpetuate slavery or its spread. [20] The Constitution, however, a later document, with its emphasis on the protection of personal property subtly permitted slavery. The problem was that the Declaration was largely a philosophical document, speaking broadly of the rights of man, while the Constitution was pragmatic, governmental and therefore more difficult to allegorize. To the exasperation of Lincoln and others, the Constitution rigidly defended private property rights (slaves included) and rested all power not ascribed to the federal government to the state government. The law of the land was clear and Lincoln felt obliged to abide by it.

Thus we see Lincoln's great dilemma with slavery. He was convicted of its sinfulness, but he did not see a way of expunging it without a breech of constitutionality. Consequently he wrote to a friend in 1855 that, "the northern people do crucify their feelings, in order to maintain their loyalty to the constitution and the Union." [21] In fact, there were cases where Lincoln, even against the convictions of his conscience, had to uphold state slave laws. "If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong" [Yet] "I have never understood that the Presidency conferred upon me an unrestricted right to act officially on this judgment and feeling."[22]

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[19] *CWL,* 2:82; 2:230.

[20] Lincoln furthermore believed that the Northwest Ordinance was intended to curb slavery. The Northwest Land Ordinance of 1787 established a precedent for United States westward expansion primarily into the land it had acquired as a result the American Revolution (North of the Ohio River and East of the Mississippi River). Besides providing new states "equal footing with the original states," funding for public education, a promise to respect the Indians, it also allowed "*neither slavery nor involuntary servitude.*"

[21] Lincoln to Joshua F. Speed, *CWL,* 2:320.

[22] *CWL,*3:92; 7:281.

The reason why Lincoln appears contradictory on the slave issue, saying one thing and doing another, is because he did not have an abolitionist's freedom; his powers were restrained by the chains of political prudence. He could not afford the liberties of an agitator, and neither could the country he was sworn to protect. Lincoln could not afford, nor would it have been just, to run his Administration according to his personal moral convictions. Lincoln was not a saint, he was a statesman.

Part Three: The National Election of 1860 and the Outbreak of War— Hope for the Abolitionists

Scarcely can one imagine a more tense national setting than the first year and a half of the 1860's. The nation seemed at the verge of bloody dismemberment. Lincoln, a radical president, replaced the more conservative Buchanan. However, for one group, the abolitionists, it was a time of hope and expectation. The combination of a Republican president and a southern rebellion gave them reason to believe that circumstances were aligning themselves for a showdown with slavery.

To the unbelievable good fortune of the Republican Party the election of 1860 supplied a four-party campaign which diverted votes from Democrat Stephan A. Douglas and gave Lincoln the victory.[23] The abolitionists rejoiced at Lincoln's victory. They were familiar with Lincoln's speeches, they had followed his debates with Douglas, and they now clung to Lincoln's moral aversion to slavery as hope for the fulfillment of their goals. Garrison's expressed his optimism even before Lincoln's election in a speech he delivered before the annual meeting of the

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[23] The 1860 election: 1) Constitutional Union Party, formed from the remnant of southern Whigs, 2) the Southern Democrats, led by Breckenridge, 3) the Northern Democrats led by Stephen A. Douglas and 4) the Republicans.

Massachusetts Anti-slavery society. Even though the Republican party *as a whole* sought to end the extension of slavery and not slavery itself, Garrison wrote, "My hope is in the great Republican party; not where it stands, but it has the *materials for growth*"[24] The "materials" no doubt included a many of its anti-slavery leaders and possibly Lincoln himself. *The Liberator* published an article translated from the *Paris Journal des Debats* which said concerning southern insubordination "At present, the North is inactive because [of] Mr. Buchanan . . . . It is now less than two months when Mr. Lincoln will be inaugurated, and if we may judge from the language of his party, the President and Congress will put South Carolina in a condition to obey"[25]

It is clear that as Lincoln ascended to the Presidency, so did the hopes of the abolitionist saints. Frederick Douglass wrote in the *Douglass Monthly* that he was tired of the "shuffling, do-nothing policy of Buchanan" and that even though abolitionists are "not too confident of the incorruptible purity of the new President, still we hope something from him."[26] "I am confident that there is not an English abolitionist who did not regard its [the election's] results as a triumph to the cause of freedom, and as indicating a hopeful and progressive state of things in the United States" wrote Garrison to a friend.[27]

The abolitionists also demonstrated hope in the coming conflict. Perhaps the most telling evidence of the abolitionists' hopefulness at what the secession could mean for freedom is Garrison's words two weeks after South Carolina seceded in 1860. "'The covenant with death' is annulled . . . at least by the action of South Carolina . . . hail the approaching jubilee, ye

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[24] *Liberator,* Feb. 4, 1859.
[25] *Liberator,* Feb. 15, 1861.
[26] *Douglass Monthly*, March 1861.
[27] Garrison to Thompson, March 9, 1862, *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison,* 6 vols., ed. Louis Ruchames and Walter M. Merrill (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979), 5: 81. Hereafter cited as *Letters of WLG.*

millions who are wearing the galling chains of slavery; for assuredly, your redemption draws nigh, bringing liberty to you and salvation to the whole land!"[28] Douglass commented along a similar vein: "the contest must now be decided, and decided forever, which of the two, Freedom or Slavery, shall give law to this Republic."[29] The May issue of the *Douglass Monthly* ran the letterhead "Freedom for All, or Chains for All." "By leaving the Union," one modern historian writes, "slaveholders created the situation in which slavery could be slavery."[30]

Even foreign commentators sympathetic to the cause of abolitionism wrote favorably of the outlook of emancipation given the circumstances. The *Liberator* published an article from the *Weldon's London Register* which said, "The present days are joyful times of triumph for American Abolitionists; a great revolution is accomplishing itself on the American continent."[31] Garrison's letter to Oliver Johnson, editor of the National Anti-slavery Standard, "Now that the civil war has begun, and a whirlwind of violence and excitement is to sweep through the country, every day increasing in intensity until its bloodiest culmination, it is for the abolitionists to 'stand still and see the salvation of God,' rather than to attempt to add any thing to the general commotion. It is no time for minute criticisms of Lincoln, Republicanism, or even the other parties."[32]

These were the attitudes of the freedom fighters; this was the sentiment of the abolitionist camp. But it was not long before their hopes were challenged, if not utterly dashed, by the events in the war and the Administration's handling of the emancipation issue. It would also not be long before their esteem of Lincoln would plummet and their impatience rise.

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[28] *Liberator*, January 4, 1861.
[29] *Douglass Monthly*, March 1861.
[30] Merton L. Dillon, *The Abolitionists: The Growth of a Dissenting Minority* (Dekalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), 251.
[31] *Liberator*, April 5, 1861
[32] Garrison to Oliver Johnson, April 19, 1861, *Letters of WLG* 5:16-18

Part Four: The Road to Emancipation

The Impatience of the Saints

Immediately after Lincoln's Presidential triumph, his voice on slavery was hushed because of the tension in the political atmosphere.[33] The South was disturbed and scheming. One month before Lincoln's inauguration seven southern states seized important Federal property within their borders and convened to form the Confederate States of America. When Lincoln did speak, he spoke sensitively to the South; while he upheld the illegality of secession, he promised not "to interfere where it [slavery] exists."[34]

It is no wonder then that Lincoln's first two years were such a disappointment for abolitionists. For them, the issue was clear, *the slaves must be emancipated.* They are weapons in the hands of the rebels. "The solemn duty and exalted privilege of the Government, UNDER THE WAR POWER, in this terrible emergency, as a matter of self-preservation, to seek the utter suppression of the rebellion through the abolition of slavery, its murderous cause" thundered Garrison in the *Liberator.*[35] Gerrit Smith added, "the President is authorized to liberate the slaves is as clear as he may, when judging there is military necessity for it, order the destruction of all the railroads in the States."[36] From the beginning of the rebellion the abolitionists viewed slave emancipation as a necessary move by the North. J. Anna Rice Powell, the president of the Ghent Anti-slavery Association wrote a letter to Lincoln which appeared in the *National Anti-*

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[33] In fact, shortly after his nomination, at the urging of his political advisors, Lincoln adopted a policy of silence on sensitive issues such as slavery; radical speeches and public statements would put his chances of victory in jeopardy. For a study on Lincoln's silence read Robert G. Gunderson, "Lincoln and the policy of Eloquent Silence: Nov. 1860-March 1861," *Quarterly of Journal of Speech* XLVII, February 1961, 1-9.
[34] *CWL.* 4:262-71.
[35] *Liberator.* January 24, 1862.
[36] *National Anti-slavery Standard.* July 27, 1861.

slavery Standard. Sections of it capture the abolitionist argument and urgency for emancipation.

> "In armed rebellion . . . their [the South's] slaves, old and young, are made available, in all possible ways, to aid and strengthen their armies, in producing supplies at home, in performing the drudgery of camp life and of field service. Slaves thus enable the rebel states to prosecute and continue the war. We hold that . . . they should be at once declared free, emancipated. In the emergency of war, you are not without the authority of precedent for the use of such power . . .."[37]

If the black slave gave strength to the confederate war effort, then "there is but one easy, short and effectual way to oppress and put down the desolating war. . ."—full and immediate emancipation.[38] Compromising with the rebel states through arduous policy-making was not the easiest path to victory. "Instead of looking around for means of reconciling freedom and slavery," wrote Douglass in 1861, "how immeasurably better would it be if, in our national councils, some Wilberforce or Buxton could arise, and . . . propose a plan for the complete abolition of slavery."[39] Just a few months after the President's inauguration, Gerrit Smith sent a letter to Owen Lovejoy a in which he complained that "hundreds of millions more of money" and "hundreds of thousands more of soldiers" are being summoned for the cause of the war. He reasoned: "Why take a costly and weary way to put it [the rebellion] down when a cheap and short one is at hand? Why choose crushing burdens of debt and immense human slaughter when both can be avoided? The liberation of the slaves has obviously become one of the necessities. . . . Let the President, in his capacity of Commander of the army, proclaim such liberation, and the war would end in thirty days."[40] Abolitionist writings and speeches early in the conflict reveal the reasons for their impatience. They did not want conciliatory statements from the Administration trying to coax the south back with slavery intact. They wanted the North to flex its political and military muscles, punish the south and put an end to black bondage.

One of Lincoln's closest advisors, Secretary of State William H. Seward, was attacked in

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[37] *National Anti-slavery Standard* July 6, 1861.
[38] *Douglass Monthly* May 1861.
[39] *Douglass Monthly* February 1861.
[40] *National Anti-slavery Standard.* July 27, 1861.

The Liberator for seeking to woo the South back to the Union. It judged that Seward's "talk of confession and compromise to traitors, while they shout defiance and wave torches over shotted guns, was as unmanly as it was wise."[41] Reverend M.D. Conway delivered a discourse at the First Congregational Church in Cincinnati comparing the compromises of the Lincoln administration with the compromise offered Jesus by the Devil in the wilderness of Judea.[42]

Lincoln's Inaugural Address caused an uproar because of its conciliatory tone. Douglass rebuked him: "It was . . . weak, uncalled for and useless for Mr. Lincoln to begin his Inaugural address at the outset by prostrating himself before the foul and withering curse of slavery . . . . Some thought we had in Mr. Lincoln the nerve and decision of an Oliver Cromwell; but the result shows that we merely have a confirmation of the Pierces and Buchanans."[43] Interestingly, however, Garrison did not condemn Lincoln outright, "It must be conceded, even by his bitterest opponents, that the new President has met the trying emergency with rare self-possession and equanimity."[44] It would not be long though before his optimism and benefit-of-doubt attitude would give way to disgust and public denouncements of the President.

The President's revocation of General John C. Fremont's Missouri proclamation was an unpardonable act in the eyes of most emancipators.[45] As Union commander in Missouri, General Fremont did not have it easy. Missouri was angrily divided on the issue of slavery and was in constant the threat of a Confederate invasion through Arkansas or Tennessee. Furthermore, Fremont's mismanagement of money in attempting to build up the army added

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[41] *Liberator*, April, 26, 1861.
[42] *Liberator*, April 19, 1861.
[43] *Douglass Monthly* April 1861
[44] *Liberator* March 8, 1861.
[45] Fremont's appearance on the Civil War scene was one of scintillating promise. The son-in-law of an affluent Missourian senator, Fremont led in the California uprising and proclaimed the state's independence. His experience as a Pathfinder, the ties his father-in-law had with the Northern antislavery Democrats, his successful military experience, a clean record in politics all gave Fremont a great advantage in the antebellum stage. In 1856, he was selected as the first Presidential candidate of the newly-formed Republican Party. At the outbreak of the war, Fremont was far more qualified than any of his contemporaries to lead the Union agenda in Missouri.

to the challenges. Nevertheless, he "could have survived all this, if he had produced victories"; but he didn't.[46]

Instead, seeking recognition from Northern radicals and desperate to control the situation, Fremont issued a drastic proposal on August 30, 1861. It declared martial law, announced the death penalty for guerillas caught behind Union lines, made provisions to confiscate all Confederate property and freed the slaves of all of the anti-Union activists in the state. Needless to say, abolitionists and radical republicans offered their support; they saw it as a long overdue measure and a great opportunity to begin the move toward national emancipation. Lincoln, however, disagreed. He immediately sent a personal request to Fremont urging him to amend his proposal to comply with the August 6 Congressional act which stipulated that only property and slaves being used directly against the Union could be seized. When Fremont stubbornly refused, Lincoln revoked it entirely.


John C. Fremont

The abolitionist reaction was fantastic. Douglass wrote, "The president interposes to cheapen the price of rebellion, and to let the rebels off on easier terms than that proposed by his faithful General."[47] Garrison called Lincoln's action a "dereliction of duty" and went so far as to say that the proposal should be made "applicable to all other slave states in revolt."[48] A few weeks later in a letter to Oliver Johnson Garrison mocked the President, "If he *is* 6 feet 4 inches high, he is only a dwarf in mind."[49] For abolitionists, Fremont's proposal was not harsh or ahead of its time; it was exactly what the times required. Severe circumstances should be dealt with severity,

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[46] McPherson. *Battle Cry.* 350.
[47] *Douglass Monthly* October 1861.
[48] *Liberator.* September 20, 1861.
[49] Garrison to Oliver Johnson, October 7, 1861, *Letters of WLG*, 5:36-38.

and a dreadful war with drastic measures. Even many years after Lincoln's death Douglass' frustration is evident in his autobiography. "The key to the situation was the four millions of slaves; yet the slave who loved us, we hated, and the slaveholder who hated us, was loved. We kissed the hand that smote us, and spurned the hand that helped us. When the means of victory [emancipation] were before us,--within our grasp,--we went in search or the means of defeat."[50] The revocation of General Fremont's proposal marked, perhaps more than any other decision by the Administration a shift in abolitionist sentiment. From that point until the Preliminary Proclamation in September of 1862, abolitionist dissatisfaction would continue to mount. After Lincoln's congressional address on December 3, 1861, which omitted entirely the emancipation question, Garrison wrote angrily: "What a wishy-washy message from the President! It is more and more evident that he is a man of very small calibre and had better be at his old business of splitting rails than at the head of a government like ours . . . . he seems incapable of uttering a humane or generous sentiment respecting the enslaved millions in our land."[51]

Another area of aggravation was Lincoln's attitude toward one of his generals—George B. McClellan.[52] Almost from the outset of his career, General McClellan rubbed abolitionists the wrong way. He had an arrogant *via media* mentality; he saw himself as the ideal of moderation and common sense in a generation mad with ultra-ism. McClellan despised extremes. Navy Secretary Gideon Wells wrote in diary, "He [McClellan] detested both South

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[50] Frederick Douglass, *Autobiographies*, Literary Classics of the United States (New York, 1994), 790.
[51] Garrison to Oliver Johnson, December 6, 1861, *Letters of WLG* 5:46-48.
[52] General George Brinton McClellan, nicknamed "The Young Napoleon" after an early demonstration of military prowess, was a graduate of West Point and served as commander of the Army of the Potomac and in late 1861 was appointed as chief commander of the Union forces. Due to McClellan's hesitation in the Peninsular Campaign, wherein he failed to take Richmond, Lincoln grew dissatisfied with him and, shortly after, removed him to aid in the Second Battle of Bull Run. Unfortunately, McClellan was not much help in that battle because he arrived late. He again saw action in the Battle of Antietam where he successfully prevented a Confederate move on the North, but was removed because of the heavy losses his troops had incurred. In the election of 1864, McClellan ran unsuccessfully against Lincoln.

Carolina and Massachusetts, and should rejoice to see both States extinguished."[53] McClellan thought that "both were and always had been ultra and mischievous, and he could not tell which he hated most."[54] McClellan's zeal was for the Union and the Constitution. He vigorously defended the laws of his beloved country, including the Fugitive Slave Law and despised Northern resistance to it. He grumbled that "the abolitionists are making such a great fuss" about it and he considered their speeches "rank and open treason--neither more or less."[55] After the outbreak of the Civil War, McClellan reassured the governor of Virginian that once the fires of rebellion had been thoroughly extinguished, he could depend on keeping his slaves.

McClellan's involvement in the Democratic Party further antagonized the emancipationists. Even though he was a Whig partisan, he was known to vote Democratic if the Whig candidate was overtly anti-slavery. He also maintained a close friendship with Samuel Barlow, a prominent Northern Democratic leader and wrote to him once, "Help me dodge the nigger--we want nothing to do with him. I am fighting to preserve the integrity of the Union and the power of the Gov't—on no other issue."[56] As a Union general, McClellan made no intents to hide his war agenda. In an interview with leading abolitionists, he insisted, "[I am] fighting for my country and the Union, not for abolition and the Republican party."[57]

George B. McClellan

The main fault abolitionists found with McClellan was his lack of military aggressiveness, which they interpreted as a half-hearted effort against the South. The

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[53] Stephen W. Sears, *George B. McClellan, The Young Napoleon.* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1988), 66.
[54] Ibid., 66.
[55] George B. McClellan to Elizabeth, quoted in Sears, *McClellan*, 32.
[56] Ibid., 128.
[57] Ibid., 161.

abolitionists saw him as immoral, blind to the curse of slavery, and unwilling to take hard action against the slaveholding rebels. The President and his cabinet too disliked his antagonism and hesitancy and believed he was much to blame for the inefficacy of the Peninsular campaign of 1862.[58] In fact, Lincoln's advisors "almost unanimously favored his dismissal."[59] Garrison wrote strongly of his displeasure at Lincoln's willingness to continue to support the ignoble general. "I am growing more and more skeptical as to the 'honesty' of Lincoln. He is nothing better than a wet rag ; and it is manifest that, in the appointment of Halleck to be Secretary of War, and McClellan commander-in-chief of the army, he is as near lunacy as any one not a pronounced Bedlamite."[60]

The impatience of the saints is further exposed in how some of them responded to Lincoln's Preliminary Proclamation issued on September 22, 1862. This proclamation stated that on January 1, 1863, "*all persons held as slaves within any state*, or designated part of a state, the people whereof shall then be *in rebellion* against the United States shall be then, thenceforward, and *forever free.*" One hundred days probation was allowed for states in rebellion to declare loyalty to the Union and perhaps retain a form of their peculiar institution. Most of the newspapers following the issue of the proclamation rejoiced. "The mists of the morning have

Emancipation Proclamation

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[58] In the Peninsular Campaign of 1862, Henry Halleck, general in chief, grumbled to his wife, "I can't get General McClellan to do what I wish." McClellan also openly disparaged John Pope, his collaborating general, because his methods differed and because he considered him a tool in the hands of the abolitionists. McClellan publicized that he anticipated Pope to "be thrashed during this coming week . . .and ought to be--such a villain as he is ought to bring defeat upon any cause that employs him . . ." (Sears. *McClellan,* 245).

[59] McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 533.

[60] Garrison to Oliver Johnson, September 9, 1862, *Letters of WLG*, 5:111-113.

rolled away; the Sun of Righteousness has dawned upon the Nation. God be praised!" extolled *The Cape Cod Republican*. *The Philadelphia Press* added, "The President has done a good deed at a good time" while *The Cincinnati Presbyterian Press* published, "We rejoice that freedom's voice has at length been heard above the noise and din of war, speaking through our President."[61]

After the proclamation, there was general praise, even though some newspapers expressed uncertainty about how this war measure would be handled after the war's conclusion. *The Anglo-American* newspaper, however, made an interesting prediction. "We are aware that many will yet grumble because the effects of the blow are not instantaneous—because the slaveholders have yet a legal three months' hold upon their victims; but we cannot join in the chorus of these fault-finders; the proclamation is too glorious . . .."[62] William Lloyd Garrison was one such fault-finder. *The Liberator* published, "Though we believe that this proclamation is not all that the exigency of the times and consequent duty of the government require—and therefore are not so jubilant over it as many others—still, it is an important step in the right direction, and an act of immense historic importance."[63] Garrison's chief complaints are the Proclamation's readiness to return hunted slaves to their masters provided their masters vow loyalty to the Union and the hundred days probation for the Rebel states to surrender. William Lloyd Garrison wrote to his wife, "It [the proclamation] postpones emancipation in the Rebel States until the 1st of January next, except as the slavers of rebel masters may escape to the Federal lines. What was wanted, what is still needed, is a proclamation, distinctly announcing the total abolition of slavery. *The President can do nothing for freedom in a direct manner, but*

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[61] Cited in *The National Anti-slavery Standard.* October 4, 1862.
[62] Cited in *The National Anti-slavery Standard.* October 4, 1862.
[63] *Liberator* September 26, 1862.

only by circumlocution [evasive language] and delay!"[64] Abolitionist reaction to Lincoln's preliminary proclamation demonstrates their dissatisfaction with him, Garrison's being the most critical. Frederick Douglass spoke more positively of it: "The *careful, and we think, the slothful deliberation* which he [Lincoln] has observed in reaching this *obvious policy, is a guarantee against its retraction.*"[65] Douglass called for all abolitionists to unite under the President and his proclamation.

The hundred days that elapsed between its announcement and its final enactment on the first of January were not without conflict for Lincoln. One of the most forceful criticisms came at this time from the editor of the *New York Tribune*, Horace Greeley. In his long letter to the President, Greeley outlines the frustration of the Radicals with Lincoln's soft-handedness. I have selected some short passages from among them:

> Dear Sir:--I do not intrude to tell you—for you must know already—that a great portion of those who triumphed in your election, an all who desire the unqualified suppression of the Rebellion now desolating our country, are *sorely disappointed and deeply pained by the policy you seem to be pursuing* with regard to the slaves of Rebels.
>
> We think *you are strangely and disastrously remiss* in the discharge of your official and imperative duty with regard to the emancipating provisions of the new Confiscation Act.
>
> We think *you are unduly influenced by the counsels*, the representations, the menaces, of certain fossil politicians hailing from the Border Slave States.
>
> We think *timid counsels in such a crisis calculated to prove perilous, and probably disastrous.*
>
> We complain that *the Union cause has suffered*, and is now suffering immensely, from mistaken deference to Rebel Slavery. Had you, Sir, in your Inaugural Address, unmistakably given notice that, in case the Rebellion already commenced were persisted in, and your efforts to preserve the Union and enforce the laws, should be resisted by armed force you would recognize no loyal person as rightfully held in slavery by a traitor, we believe the Rebellion would therein have received a staggering if not fatal blow.[66]

Lincoln did not turn out to be as pliable as abolitionists had hoped, nor was he quick to emancipate at the first given opportunity. He did not share their singular burden of unshackling the Negro. His domain was larger and more complex, he had influential and contradictory political forces to temper, he could be neither passivity nor passion. In a time when the issue of

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[64] Garrison to Fanny Garrison, Sept. 25, 1862, *Letters of WLG*, 5:114-116.
[65] *Douglass Monthly,* October 1862.
[66] Harold Holzer, *Dear Mr. Lincoln: Letters to the President.* (New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1993), 156-161.

slavery and emancipation was so divisive, he was called to be a healer and therefore, in speech and action, his method was caution.

The Caution of the Administration

Why did the Administration exercise so much caution before emancipating the southern slaves? Why the delay?

Lincoln's conciliatory language toward secessionists at the beginning of the war was a result of his understanding of his role. Like a dog about to get whipped, the South was aggressive out of fear. The abolitionist agitation in the North and the victory of a Radical republican president put in jeopardy their whole livelihood. Abraham Lincoln considered himself as their president, sworn to protect their rights under the constitution—even if that meant slave property. The fact that they seceded did not warrant the abolition of the basis of their economic system, nor did it warrant immediate war (Fort Sumter did not occur until months after South Carolina seceded). What it did warrant was a clarification of what Lincoln did and did not intend to do as President—He *did* intend on having one country, he *did not* intend on making it all free without the will of the people.

After the war had begun and it was clear that a costly sacrifice of American blood would be required to end the conflict, radical groups sought solutions in Negro emancipation. Lincoln's mind, however, was focused elsewhere. The revocation of the Fremont proclamation shows his awareness and response to larger issues. Lincoln's primary strategy in the early part of the conflict was not the seizing southern slaves (that was too controversial), but unifying the Northern support for the Union effort. Crucial to the Northern agenda was the patronage of the border-states, especially Kentucky. Lincoln wrote to a close friend, "To lose Kentucky is nearly

the same as to lose the whole game. Kentucky gone, we can not hold Missouri, nor, as I think, Maryland."[67]

Fremont's proposal caused a sensation among Unionist slaveholders in the key border-states. Letters flooded Lincoln's office. The sobering words of Joshua Speed, a long-time friend of Lincoln, capture the sentiments of the Kentucky leadership. "We could stand several defeats like that at Bulls Run, better than we can if this proclamation is *endorsed by the Administrati*on." He added, "Do not allow us by the foolish action of a military popinjay to be driven from our present active loyalty."[68] It was a delicate situation but this much was clear: Kentucky becoming a rebel state would maim the North's efforts. Therefore despite verbal assaults and harsh criticism, the president revoked General Fremont's proposal and eventually removed him from command.

Lincoln's treatment of George B. McClellan also highlights the difference between the saints and the statesman. With abolitionists clamoring for his removal and the cabinet frustrated by his defiant attitude and ineptitude, why did Lincoln not remove him from command? Lincoln's pragmatism and caution did not allow him to act on a whim. Despite McClellan's obvious shortcomings, Lincoln knew that his country needed him. Lincoln asserted, "he [McClellan] has the Army with him. . . We must use what tools we have. There is no man in the Army who can lick these troops of ours in to shape half as well as he. . . If he can't fight himself, he excels in making others ready to fight." That much was true. The Union's military messiah, Ulysses S. Grant was still in the wilderness of obscurity and Lincoln could not afford to discard McClellan, stiff-necked though he may be. Moreover, alienating McClellan would mean alienating many of the prominent Northern Democrats who shared his conservatism. The Union

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[67] Lincoln to Oliver Browning, *CWL,* 4:531-532.
[68] Speed to Lincoln, September 7, 1861, Quoted in McPherson, *Battle Cry,* 352.

needed Northern Democratic involvement and Lincoln could not afford any move that would imperil this. The abolitionists had reason to loathe McClellan and to demand his dismissal, but they failed to see his worth as a recruiter and inspirer of the troops; and even though by this point Lincoln was moving more toward emancipation and away from McClellan's conservatism, for now the Young Napoleon was necessary. A letter from anti-slavery statesman Charles Sumner to one of the abolitionists saints in July of 1862 shows the need for carefulness: "Your criticism of the President is hasty. . . . If you are disposed to be impatient at any seeming shortcomings . . . I say to you stand by the Administration . . . have faith in it."[69]

Another major reason why Lincoln exercised supreme care in handling the hot issue of emancipation was because much of the North was not yet ready to accept it. In 1862 the Republicans were divided. The Radicals subscribed to the confiscation argument. The Conservatives suggested that it was still possible for the Southern states to be talked into voluntarily giving up slavery. Lincoln and the moderates remained morally radical but wary of radical political policies. Moreover, even as Lincoln received bitter criticism from abolitionists for dragging his feet on freeing the slaves, anti-emancipation riots were terrorizing Northern cities. In the early phases of the Rebellion, on January 19, 1861, Garrison described the situation: ". . . I see our meetings everywhere mobbed down, and the cities swarming with ruffians in full sympathy with Southern traitors, and the Northern pulpits more satanic than ever, as far as they speak out against Abolitionism."[70] Somehow, however, the impatient abolitionist forces could not fully assess the clime. For example, in the March 1861 edition of the *Douglass Monthly*, the black leader writes forcefully about need to end slavery in order to win the war; a little later, in the same issue, he writes about the anti-abolition mobs that wax strong in much of

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[69] *Douglass Monthly,* July 1862.
[70] Garrison to Oliver Johnson, January 19, 1861, *Letters of WLG* 5:4-6.

the North and relates the "breaking up a lawful meeting in Tremont temple" by the Boston public."[71] It is obvious that the abolitionists were calling for the Administration to do something even free America wasn't ready for. In his autobiography, Frederick Douglass reflected, "It came to be no uncommon thing to hear a man denouncing South Carolina and Massachusetts in the same breath and in the same measure of disapproval."[72] Even through much of 1862 one can read in abolitionist papers the influence that Northern mobs continued to have. In April of that year, Douglass wrote in his paper about the breakup of Wendell Phillips' meeting in Cincinnati concluding sadly, "slavery is not dead in the North."[73]

What, then, eventually pushed Lincoln to carry out a proposal of emancipation? 1862 was an important and busy year for the Administration; there was a shifting, a radicalizing that was taking place, a greater willingness to free the slave for the sake of peace and victory. Notice the following sequence of events:

- ***March 6, 1862***—Lincoln proposes a Congressional bill to aid states in adopting gradual emancipation. It was adopted a little over a month later.
- ***March 13, 1862***—An article is passed prohibiting Northern troops from returning fugitive slaves.
- ***April 10, 1862***—Congress declares that compensation will be afforded for slave-owners who voluntarily free their slaves.
- ***April 16, 1862***—All slaves in the District of Columbia are freed through compensation.
- ***May 1862***— Lincoln and his administration continued to work, diligently, cautiously and quietly, even though he revoked another proposal similar to Fremont, this one by General David-Hunters.[74] Lincoln dismissed it quietly.
- ***June 19, 1862***—The *Dred Scott* Supreme Court decision is overturned and congress declares that slavery in the territories is prohibited.

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[71] *Douglass Monthly* March 1861.
[72] Frederick Douglass, *Autobiographies*, 770.
[73] *Douglass Monthly* April 1862.
[74] General David-Hunters declared martial law and abolished slavery in three states from the islands off the coast of South Carolina.

- ***July 2, 1862***—Congress passed its second confiscation act and gave the President the power of emancipation.

- ***July 12, 1862***—Lincoln beseeched the border-state leadership to accept gradual emancipation. This was Lincoln's last appeal for mitigated change. Two-thirds refused it without much conversation.

- ***July 22, 1862***—Lincoln's cabinet convened to draw up an emancipation bill. All except Montgomery Blair were in accordance, but Secretary of State William Seward, advised Lincoln to wait until the Union had momentum on the battlefield before officially enacting it lest the world community see it "as the last measure of an exhausted government, a cry for help, . . . our last shriek in retreat."[75]

- ***September 17, 1862***— A slim Union victory at Antietam Creek instigates Lincoln to call for a cabinet meeting to discuss the Emancipation Proclamation.

- ***September 22, 1862***—The Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation is issued allowing for a probation period of 100 days before southern slaves are officially liberated.

The year 1862 was a time of Northern polarization. While anti-emancipation sentiment was still energetic in many quarters, many of those in the middle were becoming more and more radical. They were beginning to assimilate the ugliness of war and to realize that slavery was only contributing to it. Union defeat at the first battle of Bull Run on July 21, 1861 had aptly demonstrated that the sectional conflict would be more grievous and would take longer to resolve than anyone previously expected. It impressed abolitionists more than ever about the need to fight not only the South but the South's source of power—slavery. Frederick Douglass wrote, "To fight against slaveholders, without fighting against slavery, is but a half-hearted business, and paralyzes the hands engaged in it . . . Fire must be met with water. . . War for the destruction of liberty must be met with war for the destruction of slavery."[76] As the war dragged on it became more apparent that the Union's survival seemed dependent on the extinction of slavery. The longer the chaos continued, the more sympathetic the North became to emancipation as a means of ending it. The *Boston Adviser,* a conservative newspaper, observed: "the great

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[75] In reality, Great Britain and France were critical of Lincoln's proclamation and his motives for it.
[76] *Douglass Monthly,* May 1861.

phenomenon of the year is the terrible intensity which this [emancipation] resolution has acquired. A year ago men might have faltered at the thought of proceeding to this extremity, [but now] they are in great measure prepared for it."[77]

No doubt, 1862 was a radicalizing year. According to McPherson, "antislavery bills poured into the congressional hopper like leaves dropping from trees in autumn."[78] The bitter taste of war had been sitting in their mouth for over a year—it was time to seek alleviation. Many Northerners were not ready for the emancipation measure, but perhaps, they would never be. The Administration was ready and finally, on September 22, 1862—it was done.

In this crab-like walk toward freedom the complex dynamics of Northern politics and abolitionists impatience are revealed. While the abolitionists' proposals were morally justifiable and more worthy of modern sympathy, they were too rigid and, in a sense, too advanced and too radical. The fact that the slave was entitled to freedom was a point of agreement between Lincoln and the abolitionists. However, in their hasty resolve, abolitionists lost sight of the numerous other issues of the war. The times demanded incremental change, a competent and careful hand. The country needed as foreman not a Garrison or Douglass or any fiery radical but a sensible and pragmatic Lincoln. In short, it needed a president, not a saint.

I think Frederick Douglass realized this when at Lincoln Park, Washington D.C. in April 14, 1876, before a crowd at a memorial dedication service for the late president, he said: "Viewed from a genuine abolition ground, Mr. Lincoln seemed tardy, cold, dull and indifferent; but measuring him by the sentiment of his country, a sentiment he was bound as a statesman to consult, he was swift, zealous, radical, and determined . . .."[79] I think he realized it when he

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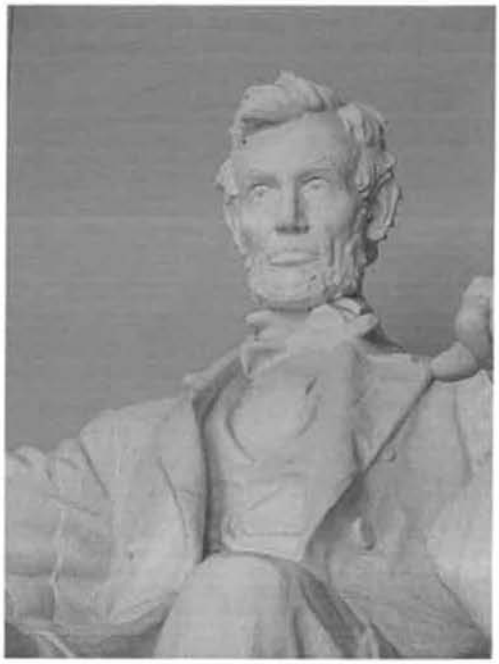
[77] Quoted in McPherson, *Battle Cry,* 496.
[78] McPherson. *Battle Cry.* 496.
[79] Quoted in Benjamin Quarles, *Frederick Douglass* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1968), 78.

wrote in his autobiography, "Lincoln was not only a great President, but a great man—too great to be small in anything."[80]

The Legacy of Lincoln and the Abolitionists

The spirit of Lincoln and the abolitionists live today in the bosom of the American character. Historically, the abolitionists appear a motley and daring group, campaigning against injustice, pushing society to change and pushing political possibilities. In their courage and conviction that social injustice must be challenged, exposed and ultimately eradicated, they instilled in America a fervent belief in the possibility of sweeping social change. Their appeal for change through violent revolution, pacifism, non-resistance, moving the masses and working within the political system have been a source of inspiration and imitation for some of the major social movements of the our century. The abolitionists, in many ways, are ancestors to Martin Luther King Jr., Betty Friedan, Cesar Chavez and the hundreds of voices that speak today in the halls of American liberalism. Their splendid vision of a United States bereft of hate, bigotry and disparity continues to challenge us today. In the same time, though on a more political plane, the impact of Abraham Lincoln on American government cannot be questioned. Through sculpted eyes and from his stony encasement, he watches over the affairs of the nation and reminds us of what cautious,



[80] Frederick Douglass, *Autobiographies*, 797.

pragmatic politics can achieve or—perhaps more importantly—prevent. His example of a circumspect and sensitive guide through what was one of America's most trying periods has left its impress on the American presidency.

Lincoln, the statesman, and the abolitionists, the saints, though divided in the past together have steered us to where we stand today—One Nation, Indivisible, with Freedom and Justice for All.

Bibliographical Essay

The main primary sources I consulted for this endeavor were *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 9 vols., ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55), *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison,* 6 vols., ed. Louis Ruchames and Walter M. Merrill (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979), and three of the major abolitionist newspapers: *The Liberator, The Douglass Monthly,* and the *National Anti-slavery Standard.* The authoritative *Collected Works* and the *Letters of William Lloyd Garrison* are a blessing for any researcher of the Civil War era because they are well indexed, chronologically arranged and popular among libraries. The abolitionist newspapers, on the other hand, more difficult to obtain and not indexed at all but are nevertheless invaluable understanding their mindset during the war. Frederick Douglass' autobiographical writings and reflections after the war's end also proved helpful, although one must take into consideration hindsight's penchant for sentimentalism and rectification. Frederick Douglass, *Autobiographies*, Literary Classics of the United States (New York, 1994)

James M. McPherson, undoubtedly one of America's finest historians, published two books that I found extremely useful, *The Struggle for Equality* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1964) and *Battle Cry of Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). *Battle Cry,* noted for the quality and comprehensiveness of its scholarship, was my chief source for understanding the complexities of the war.

Gerald Sorin's *Abolitionism: A New Perspective,* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972, Merton L. Dillon's *The Abolitionists: The Growth of a Dissenting Minority* (Dekalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), Benjamin Quarles' *Frederick Douglass* (Englewood

Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1968) and David W. Blight's, *Frederick Douglass' Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee,* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991) were a helpful examination into the different abolitionists groups, how they responded to the war, the administration and to each other. The *National American Biography* website is an outstanding resource of life sketches and contributions of notable Americans. I found it a great place to begin my research and acquaint myself with the major influencers of the abolitionist tradition. An excellent biography on the life of General George B. McClellan's is Stephen W. Sears, *George B. McClellan, The Young Napoleon*. (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1988).

Although biographies of Lincoln abound, James G. Randall's *Lincoln the President,* 4 vols. (New York: Dodd, Mead & co., 1945-1955) and David Herbert Donald's *Lincoln,* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995) are two of the best. For an understanding of how the administration moved toward freedom I used Howard Jones, *Abraham Lincoln and a New Birth of Freedom,* (University of Nebraska Press, 1999).

SOUTHERN SCHOLARS SENIOR PROJECT

Name: EDDIE VARGAS Date: 1/13/03 Major: HISTORY / THEOLOGY

SENIOR PROJECT

A significant scholarly project, involving research, writing, or special performance, appropriate to the major in question, is ordinarily completed the senior year. The project is expected to be of sufficiently high quality to warrant a grade of A and to justify public presentation.

Under the guidance of a faculty advisor, the Senior Project should be an original work, should use primary sources when applicable, should have a table of contents and works cited page, should give convincing evidence to support a strong thesis, and should use the methods and writing style appropriate to the discipline.

The completed project, to be turned in in duplicate, must be approved by the Honors Committee in consultation with the student's supervising professor three weeks prior to graduation. Please include the advisor's name on the title page. The 2-3 hours of credit for this project is done as directed study or in a research class.

Keeping in mind the above senior project description, please describe in as much detail as you can the project you will undertake. You may attach a separate sheet if you wish:

I am investigating the relationship between Abraham Lincoln and the Abolitionists during the first [redacted] years of the Civil War. My emphasis is on their views regarding how the issue of emancipation should be handled.

Signature of faculty advisor Bega McArthur Expected date of completion Feb 27, 2003

Approval to be signed by faculty advisor when completed:

This project has been completed as planned: ✓

This in an "A" project: ✓

This project is worth 2-3 hours of credit: ✓

Advisor's Final Signature Bega McArthur

Chair, Honors Committee _____ Date Approved: _____

Dear Advisor, please write your final evaluation on the project on the reverse side of this page. Comment on the characteristics that make this "A" quality work.