

Chapter Seventeen

“I Will Suffer Death Before I Will Consent to
Any Concession or Compromise”:
President-elect in Springfield (1860-1861)

During the four months separating his election from his inauguration, Lincoln faced the daunting challenge of Southern secession. Though he would not officially take power until March 1861, his party looked to him for guidance. Like most Republicans, he was startled when the Cotton States made good their supposedly idle threats to withdraw from the Union.¹ Should they be allowed to go in peace? Should they be forcibly resisted? Should they be conciliated or appeased? What compromise measures might preserve national unity without sacrificing the party's principles?

Radicals like Zachariah Chandler believed “all will be well” if Lincoln would only “Stand like an Anvil when the sparks fall thick & fast, a fiery shower,” but some Republicans feared that he would not do so.² A few days after the election, Charles Francis Adams viewed Southern threats to secede as a means “to frighten Mr Lincoln at the outset, and to compel him to declare himself in opposition to the principles of the party that has elected him.” Adams confessed that he awaited the president-elect's

¹ David M. Potter, Lincoln and His Party in the Secession Crisis (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942), 75-80.

² Zachariah Chandler to Lyman Trumbull, Detroit, 13 November 1860, Trumbull Family Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. Chandler was quoting, somewhat inaccurately, from a poem by George Washington Doane.

reaction “with some misgivings,” for “the swarms that surround Mr Lincoln are by no means the best.”³

Adams need not have worried, for Lincoln sided with the “stiff-backed” Republicans in rejecting any concession of basic principle, just as he had rebuffed those eastern Republicans who two years earlier had supported the reelection of Douglas. Secession would not be tolerated, nor would slavery be allowed to expand into the territories. “By no act or complicity of mine, shall the Republican party become a mere sucked egg, all shell & no principle in it,” he told a visitor in January 1861.⁴ If it meant war, then so be it. He remarked to a Republican leader in Illinois: “we have got plenty of corn & pork and it wouldn’t be exactly brave for us to leave this question to be settled by posterity.”⁵ Horace White thought Lincoln was “quite belligerent.”⁶

When a Virginia newspaper argued that Lincoln should quiet the Southerners’ fears by letting them take slaves into the western territories, he said he was reminded of a little girl who wanted to go outside and play. Her mother refused permission. When the youngster begged and whined insistently, she exhausted the patience of her mother, who gave the child a sound thrashing. “Now, Ma, I can certainly run out,” exclaimed the girl.⁷ When Thomas Hutchinson of Kentucky informed Lincoln that his state would support the

³ Charles Francis Adams diary, 11 November 1860, Adams Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁴ Lincoln told this to George Sumner on January 21. George Sumner to John A. Andrew, Springfield, 21 January 1861, Andrew Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁵ According to Horace White, Lincoln said this to William Plato of Kane County. White reported it to Herman Kreismann, who passed it along to E. B. Washburne. Kreismann to Washburne, Washington, 27 December 1860, Washburne Papers, Library of Congress.

⁶ Kreismann to E. B. Washburne, Washington, 27 December 1860, Washburne Papers, Library of Congress.

⁷ Springfield correspondence, 18 November, St. Louis Westliche Post, n.d., in Thomas J. McCormick, ed., Memoirs of Gustave Koerner, 1809-1896 (2 vols.; Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Torch Press, 1909), 2:105.

secessionists if coercion were employed against them, the president-elect “with emphasis” replied: “If Kentucky means to say that if the federal government undertakes to recapture the southern forts and collect the revenue and war ensues, she will unite with the South, let her prepare for war.”⁸ With some justice, Herndon called his law partner “Jackson redivivus” and assured Wendell Phillips that “Lincoln has a superior will – good common sense, and moral, as well as physical courage.” The president-elect, he predicted, would “make a grave yard of the South, if rebellion or treason lifts its head: he will execute the laws, as against Treason & Rebellion.” His Republican convictions were as “as firm . . . as the rocks [sic] of Gibraltar.” To be sure, on “questions of economy – policy – calculations – . . . & dollars you can rule him; but on the questions of Justice – Right – Liberty he rules himself.”⁹ Repeatedly Lincoln told Herndon “that rather than back down – rather than concede to traitors, his soul might go back to God from the wings of the Capitol.”¹⁰

On December 13, Lincoln’s secretary, John G. Nicolay, summarized his boss’s views on secession: “From conversations and expressions at different times during the last three weeks I think the following are substantially his opinions about secession:

“The very existence and organization of a general and national government implies both the legal (power), right and duty of maintaining its own integrity. This if not expressed is at least implied in the Constitution.

⁸ Louisville Courier-Journal, 11 February, copied in the Cincinnati Enquirer, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Register (Springfield), 13 February 1861.

⁹ Herndon to Wendell Phillips, Springfield, 28 December 1860, 12 January 1861, and 1 February 1861, Phillips Papers, Harvard University. Herndon made the same point to Lyman Trumbull. Herndon to Trumbull, Springfield, 27 January 1861, Lyman Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁰ Herndon to Samuel Sewall, Springfield, 1 February 1861, copy, William Lloyd Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

“The right of a state to secede is not an open or debatable question. It was fully discussed in Jackson’s time, and denied not only by him by also by a vote of . . . Congress.

“It is the duty of a President to execute the laws, and maintain the existing government. He cannot entertain any proposition for dissolution or dismemberment. He was not elected for any such purpose.

“As a matter of theoretical speculation it is probably true that if the people, (with whom the whole question rests) should become tired of the present government they may change it in the manner prescribed by the Constitution.”¹¹

Lincoln’s firmness was rooted in a profound self-respect which forbade knuckling under to what he perceived as extortionate bullying. He insisted that “he did not wish to pay for being inaugurated.”¹² In addition, his hatred of slavery and his unwillingness to abandon the principle of majority rule made him reluctant to appease disunionists. Moreover, if secession were tolerated, the nation and the idea for which it stood – that ordinary people should have a significant voice in their governance and be allowed to advance socially and economically as far as their talent, virtue, industry, and ability allowed – would be discredited. Practical political considerations also influenced his thinking, for he could ill afford to alienate the many Republicans opposed to any abandonment of the party’s platform.¹³

¹¹ Memorandum by Nicolay, Springfield, 13 December 1860, Michael Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House: Letters, Memoranda, and Other Writings of John G. Nicolay, 1860-1865 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 16-17.

¹² He told this to Thomas J. Pickett on January 19. George Sumner to John A. Andrew, Springfield, 21 January 1861, Andrew Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

¹³ Kenneth M. Stamp, And the War Came: The North and the Secession Crisis, 1860-1861 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950), 136-53, 155-57, 167-70, 186-87.

While struggling with these vexatious problems, Lincoln had to assert his leadership against the formidable challenge of William Henry Seward, who presumed that, as secretary of state, he would dominate the administration while the president served as little more than a figure-head. A journalist had good reason to predict that if Lincoln named Seward to the cabinet, it would “be tantamount to his resignation in Seward’s favor.”¹⁴ The Sage of Auburn told a European diplomat that there “exists no great difference between an elected president of the United States and a hereditary monarch. The latter is called to the throne through the accident of birth, the former through the chances which make his election possible. The actual direction of public affairs belongs to the leader of the ruling party here just as in a hereditary principality.”¹⁵ Seward considered himself, not Lincoln, the “leader of the ruling party.” In his own eyes, he was a responsible, knowledgeable veteran statesman who must guide the naïve, inexperienced Illinoisan toward sensible appointments and policies. Unlike Lincoln, he did not believe that the new administration had to carry out the Chicago platform. At a dinner given by Douglas in February 1861, Seward proposed this toast: “Away with all parties, all platforms, all previous committals, and whatever else will stand in the way of restoration of the American Union.”¹⁶

Physically unprepossessing, Seward had a powerful personality and a keen intellect. A friend described his appearance thus: “a wee, little, frail, dried-up body, surmounted by an immense head of oblong dimensions and covered with a mass of iron

¹⁴ Washington correspondence by “Ion,” 20 November, *Baltimore Sun*, 21 November 1861.

¹⁵ Seward told this to Baron Rudolph Schleiden, minister to the U. S. from the Republic of Bremen. Schleiden, dispatch to his home government, Washington, 18 February 1861, copy, Carl Schurz Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁶ Memorandum by John A. Campbell, n.d., in Henry G. Connor, *John Archibald Campbell, Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court, 1853-1861* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1920), 116.

gray hair; not very high forehead, but broad and deep from front to line of ears; calm, steel gray eyes, deep set, and heavily fringed by eyelashes and eyebrows; an enormous Roman nose, but well formed; rather a sensuous mouth, smooth shaven face, showing a rather receding chin, which was drawn in and down.” Seward’s “diminutive body, large head, and face made him a marked personality aside from his great reputation as a statesman.”¹⁷ Henry Adams limned him memorably as “a slouching slender figure; a head like a wise macaw; a beaked nose; shaggy eyebrows; unordered hair and clothes; hoarse voice; offhand manner; free talk, and perpetual cigar.”¹⁸ He charmed friend and foe alike. One of his bitterest enemies in the Lincoln administration, Montgomery Blair, called him “a kindly man in his social relations” who “had a warm and sympathetic feeling for all that pertained to his domestic life.” Blair “always found his society attractive” because of the “freshness and heartiness in his manner” and his humorous conversation.¹⁹ William Howard Russell of the London Times deemed Seward “a subtle, quick man, rejoicing in power” and “fond of badinage, bursting with the importance of state mysteries.”²⁰ A prominent Indiana Republican objected to giving the New Yorker the state department portfolio because “Mr. Seward and his friends would create the impression that it was his administration! That will not do. The people must be made to understand from the start that Mr. Lincoln is the President in fact, as well as in name.”²¹

¹⁷ Hamilton Gay Howard, Civil War Echoes: Character Sketches and States Secrets (Washington: Howard, 1907), 132.

¹⁸ Henry Adams, The Education of Henry Adams (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1918), 104.

¹⁹ Montgomery Blair to Gideon Welles, Washington, 17 May 1873, Welles Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁰ Frederic Bancroft, The Life of William H. Seward (2 vols.; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1900), 1:464.

²¹ John D. Defrees to Jesse K. Dubois, Indianapolis, 12 November 1860, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

Immediately after the election, Lincoln was inundated with mail.²² John Hay reported that Lincoln “reads letters constantly – at home – in the street – among his friends. I believe he is strongly tempted in church.”²³ The sculptor Thomas D. Jones, who executed a bust of Lincoln that winter, told a friend that the president-elect “generally opened about seventy letters every morning in my [hotel] room. He read all the short ones – laid all of the long ones aside. One morning he opened a letter of ten or twelve pages folio – he immediately returned it into the envelope – saying – ‘That man ought to be sent to the Penitentiary, or lunatic assylum.’”²⁴ Henry Villard, stationed in Springfield by the New York Herald and the Cincinnati Commercial to cover the president-elect, observed that “Lincoln’s correspondence would offer a most abundant source of knowledge to the student of human nature.” The mail, which “emanates from representatives of all grades of society,” included “grave effusions of statesmen,” poetic tributes, “disinterested advice of patriots,” “able editorials” clipped from innumerable journals, “wretched wood-cut representations of his surroundings,” volumes from “speculative booksellers,” inventors’ circulars and samples, “well calculated, wheedling praises” from “the expectant politician,” “[e]xuberant wide awake enthusiasm,” as well as “the meaningless commonplaces of scribblers from mere curiosity.” Nicolay often called his boss’s attention to “[f]emale forwardness and inquisitiveness.” More ominously, letters arrived

²² His personal secretary, John G. Nicolay, reported that the Lincoln received approximately seventy to seventy-five missives a day between November and January. John G. Nicolay to Theresia Bates, Springfield, 18 November 1860 and 6 January 1861, Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 11-12, 23. In late January it was reported that Nicolay “has almost given way under the task of daily opening, reading, filing and answering this superabundance of correspondence.” Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 29 January, Cincinnati Commercial, 1 February 1861.

²³ Springfield correspondence by Hay, 9 January, Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 11 January 1861, Michael Burlingame, ed., Lincoln’s Journalist: John Hay’s Anonymous Writings for the Press, 1860-1864 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 18.

²⁴ Thomas D. Jones to [William Linn McMillen], Springfield, 11 February 1861, Lincoln Collection, Lilly Library, Indiana University.

from impulsive Southerners containing “senseless fulminations, and, in a few instances, disgraceful threats and indecent drawings.”²⁵ Indecent language also appeared in some missives, including one from A. G. Frick: “if you don't Resign we are going to put a spider in your dumpling and play the Devil with you you god or mighty god dam sundde of a bit[c]h go to hell and kiss my Ass suck my prick and call my Bolics your uncle Dick goddam a fool and goddam Abe Lincoln who would like you goddam you excuse me for using such hard words with you but you need it you are nothing but a goddam Black nigger.”²⁶ Many others urged Lincoln to resign.²⁷ An anonymous correspondent, signing himself “Hand of God against you,” cursed Lincoln: “May the hand of the devil strike you down before long— You are destroying the country. Damn you – every breath you take.”²⁸ (From South Carolina, Mrs. Lincoln received a picture of her husband with a rope about his neck, his feet in manacles, and his back coated with tar and feathers.)²⁹ Such threats did not bother him.³⁰ The imperturbable president-elect, Henry Villard reported, “reads and beholds everything philosophically, and preserves the most valuable literary and artistic gems, and consigns the balance to the stove or paper basket.”³¹ To

²⁵ Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 26 November, New York Herald, 1 December 1860.

²⁶ A. G. Frick to Lincoln, n.p., 14 February 1861, Lincoln Collection, Chicago History Museum.

²⁷ Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 28 November, Cincinnati Commercial, 1 December 1860.

²⁸ Anonymous to Lincoln, n.p., 20 February 1861, Lincoln Collection, Chicago History Museum.

²⁹ Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, n.d., Cincinnati Commercial, n.d., copied in the Albany Evening Journal, 29 January 1861.

³⁰ James C. Conkling to Lyman Trumbull, Springfield, 2 January 1861, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

³¹ Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 28 November, Cincinnati Commercial, 1 December 1860.

suggestions that he resign, Lincoln replied that “it will do no good to put him out of the way” for “Hamlin has plenty of backbone” and “plenty of Pluck.”³²

To carve out time to answer his more polite letters as well as to formulate a Southern policy, to consider cabinet appointments, and to compose his inaugural address, Lincoln restricted public visits to two hours in the morning and two and a half in the afternoon. (He usually arose before dawn, breakfasted around 7 a.m., arrived at the office by 8, and read mail and held private interviews till 10.) A typical levee began with the crowd making its way up the stairs of the statehouse to the governor’s reception room, which continued to be available to Lincoln throughout November and December. (Thereafter he used a room in the nearby Johnson’s Building.) Upon reaching their destination, callers were greeted by the president-elect, who shook hands with the leader of the delegation and heartily announced: “Get in, all of you.” Fewer than twenty could comfortably be accommodated. After informal introductions, he genially launched a conversation. Villard reported that in “this respect he displays more than ordinary talent and practice. Although he is naturally more listened than talked to, he does not allow a pause to become protracted. He is never at a loss as to subjects that please the different classes of visitors, and there is a certain quaintness and originality about all he has to say, so that one cannot help feeling interested. His ‘talk’ is not brilliant. His phrases are not ceremoniously set, but pervaded by a humorousness, and, at times, a grotesque joviality, that will always please. I think it would be hard to find one who tells better jokes, enjoys them better and laughs oftener, than Abraham Lincoln.” Some of the jokes, Villard informed his readers, “are rather crude, both as to form and substance. But they are

³² Hawkins Taylor to Benjamin F. Wade, Keokuk, Iowa, 25 December 1860, Wade Papers, Library of Congress.

regularly to the point, and hence never come short of effect.”³³ (In his memoirs, Villard offered a less favorable assessment of Lincoln’s humor: “I could not take a real personal liking to the man” because of his vulgar taste: “the coarser the joke, the lower the anecdote, and the more risky the story, the more he enjoyed them.” Villard added that Lincoln “never hesitated to tell a coarse or even outright nasty story, if it served his purpose. . . . this fondness for low talk clung to him even in the White House. More than once I heard him ‘with malice aforethought’ get off purposely some repulsive fiction in order to rid himself of an uncomfortable caller. Again and again I felt disgust and humiliation that such a person should have been called upon to direct the destinies of a great nation in the direst period of its history.”)³⁴ All sorts of people availed themselves of the opportunity to call on the president-elect: “Muddy boots and hickory shirts are just as frequent as broadcloth, fine linen &c.” Women “are usually dressed up in their very best.” Not all visitors behaved well: “Offensively democratic exhibitions of free manners” were common. “Churlish fellows,” with their hats on and pants tucked into their boots and reeking of the barnyard, would smoke malodorous cigars, “puffing away and trying to gorgonize the President with their silent stares, until their boorish curiosity is fully satisfied.” Occasionally a few “rustics rush in, break their way through other visitors up to the object of their search, and, after calling their names and touching the Presidential fingers, back out again without delay.”³⁵

³³ Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 17 November, 10 December, New York Herald, 22 November, 15 December 1860; Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 19 November, Cincinnati Commercial, 21 November 1860.

³⁴ Henry Villard, Memoirs of Henry Villard, Journalist and Financier: 1838-1900 (2 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1904), 1:93-94, 144.

³⁵ Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 17 November, New York Herald, 21 November 1860; Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 19 November, Cincinnati Commercial, 21 November 1860.

Those receptions were fittingly democratic. As Nicolay recalled, Lincoln showed no signs “of elevation or rulership; he was still the kind neighbor and genial companion, who had for every one he met the same bearing which for a quarter of a century had made his name a household synonym of manly affection, virtue, and honor.”³⁶ Richard C. McCormick, who spent a week in Springfield that winter, remembered that the “roughest and most tedious visitors were made welcome and happy in his presence; the poor commanded as much of his time as the rich. His recognition of old friends and companions in rough life, whom many, elevated as he had been, would have found it convenient to forget, was especially hearty.”³⁷ The New York Tribune reported that “Mr. Lincoln receives all with equal urbanity. He sits or stands among his guests, throwing out hearty Western welcomes, asking and answering questions, joking, and endeavoring to make matters every way comfortable to all present. If a bashful stranger appears, manifesting a little awe at the sudden contact with the new President, Mr. Lincoln is likely to give him a word or two of particular attention, and pretty nearly sure to soon set him at his ease.” Occasionally he would take a break to confer with Nicolay at a corner table strewn with books and newspapers.³⁸ After an interview in late December, one eastern merchant described the president-elect as “perfectly cool,” “very discreet of remark,” and “thoroughly ‘posted’” about “the entire history of our

³⁶ John G. Nicolay and John Hay, Abraham Lincoln: A History (10 vols.; New York: Century, 1890), 3:247.

³⁷ Richard C. McCormick’s reminiscences, New York, 29 April, New York Evening Post, 3 May 1865.

³⁸ Springfield correspondence, 8 November, New York Tribune, 14 November 1860.

Government – with all persons of note that from time to time have been connected with it – with all that surrounds him now!”³⁹

Another caller asked the president-elect to explain how Southerners could, with a straight face, argue that they were just as entitled to carry slaves into the western territories as Northerners were to carry any form of property there. “Do you not see,” replied Lincoln, “that the South is right from her point of view? We northerners, if we go into the territories, are able to live without slaves, but the southerners are not. The southerner is not a perfect human being without his negro. . . . There is an old proverb: ‘Clothes make the man;’ but it is also true that ‘Negroes make the man.’”⁴⁰

Many callers sought jobs. “These office-seekers are a curse to this country,” he told a Canadian visitor early in the Civil War. “No sooner was my election certain, than I became the prey of hundreds of hungry, persistent applicants for office, whose highest ambition it is to feed at the government crib.”⁴¹ In Springfield, would-be civil servants met with frustration. As a journalist reported: “Mr. Lincoln receives all visitors, low or high, with admirable good humor and cordiality, but promptly disposes of all demands upon his consideration for patronage by an unequivocal refusal to commit himself in any shape whatever.”⁴² By January, job hunters had learned “that the best way to secure Presidential disfavor is to bore [i.e., annoy] him with their applications at this time, when

³⁹ George B. Lincoln to Schuyler Colfax, Chicago, 29 December 1860, Lincoln Collection, Brown University. George B. Lincoln visited the president-elect at his home on December 22.

⁴⁰ Interview in an unidentified Western German newspaper, copied in the Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican, 28 February 1861.

⁴¹ Alexander Milton Ross, Recollections and Experiences of an Abolitionist, from 1855 to 1865 (Toronto: Rowsell and Hutchinson, 1875), 139.

⁴² Springfield correspondence by W., 3 February, Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican, 12 February 1861.

he is devoted to greater affairs.”⁴³ He told a young friend, who informally asked for a land office post, “that he would forget such requests of his friends, unless the person himself or some friend would present their claims at the proper time & place.”⁴⁴

That winter the nation trembled at the prospect of secession and the possibility of war. Between December and February, seven states of the Deep South, fearing that Lincoln’s victory would lead to emancipation and social chaos, withdrew from the Union amid cries of “nigger equality,” “abolitionism,” “Black Republicanism,” “spaniel submissionists,” “buck niggers and our daughters,” “equality in the territories,” and “equal rights.”⁴⁵ According to an Arkansasan, many Southerners “have been taught that Lincoln intends to use every means to instigate revolt among the slaves; that the Republicans are organized into military companies, and intend to march against the South under the leadership of Giddings, Seward & Co., to cut the throat of every white man, distribute the white females among the negroes, and to carry off each man for himself an ebony beauty to ornament and grace his home in the North; that northern white men are more impressed by the charms of a dark, rich hue, than by their pale faced beauties at home.”⁴⁶ Southerners disliked the North in general and New England in particular. “I look upon the whole New England race as a troublesome unquiet set of meddlers – their original stock a set of jailbirds outlaws and disturbers of the peace, who could not live

⁴³ Springfield correspondence, 8 January, Chicago Tribune, 10 January 1861.

⁴⁴ George M. Brinkerhoff to Edward McPherson, Springfield, 30 January 1861, McPherson Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁵ William S. Spear to Lyman Trumbull, Shelbyville, Tennessee, 16 January 1861, Lyman Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress; Stephen A. Channing, Crisis of Fear: Secession in South Carolina (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 17-293; Dwight L. Dumond, The Secession Movement, 1860-1861 (New York: Macmillan, 1931), 113-212; David M. Potter, The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861 (completed and edited by Don E. Fehrenbacher; New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 485-513.

⁴⁶ Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 14 December 1860.

among decent and civilized people in Europe,” said J. Henly Smith, a Georgia journalist. The “same intolerant and turbulent spirit has been transmitted to their posterity and will cling to it to the latest generation. The greatest calamity that ever happened to this country, was that the Mayflower, with all on board, was not swamped before they reached these shores. I look for no peace, or justice to be accorded to us, while we maintain connection with such a breed.”⁴⁷

Fear of slave revolts had long pervaded the South, especially in areas where blacks were most numerous; that fear intensified dramatically after John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry.⁴⁸ A perceived upsurge of slave insubordination frightened slaveholders and led them to favor secession.⁴⁹ When asked, “Do you desire the millions of negro population of the South, to be set free among us, to stalk abroad in the land, following the dictates of their own natural instincts, committing depredations, rapine, and murder upon the whites?” they replied “NO!” and seceded.⁵⁰ In September 1860, Lawrence Keitt of South Carolina, which had proportionally the largest black population in the country (57%), told a friend: “See – poison in the wells in Texas and fire for the Houses in Alabama – Our negroes are being enlisted in politics – With fire and poison how can we stand it? If northern men get access to our negroes to advise poison and the torch we must

⁴⁷ J. Henly Smith to Alexander H. Stephens, Washington, 3 April 1860, Alexander H. Stephens Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁸ Potter, Impending Crisis, 452-54. Blacks in the Deep South constituted 47% of the population; in the Upper South, 32%; and the Border States, 17%. James L. Abrahamson, The Men of Secession and Civil War, 1859-1861 (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 2000), 85.

⁴⁹ William A. Link, Roots of Secession: Slavery and Politics in Antebellum Virginia (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 1-10, 177-244.

⁵⁰ Salisbury, North Carolina, Banner, 19 February 1861, in Daniel W. Crofts, Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 94.

prevent it at every hazard.”⁵¹ Two months later a fellow congressman in the Palmetto State told a Northerner: “Our women & children are ready & eager for the conflict & would kick us out of our homes if we basely & tamely yield again. Our young girls – Daughters – from 12 to 15 years of age are entreating us – their Fathers – to train them in the use of fire arms & daggers We will arm them, & . . . carry them to the battle field with us. Better for them that they encounter the horrors & chances of war, than endure ‘negro equality,’ & ‘emancipation’ & its logical result ‘amalgamation.’”⁵² A South Carolina newspaper declared: “The midnight glare of the incendiary’s torch will illuminate the country from one end to the other; while pillage, violence, murder, poisons and rape will fill the air with the demoniac revelry of all the passions of an ignorant, semi-barbarous race, urged to madness by the licentious teachings of our Northern brethren. A war of races – a war of extermination – must arise, like that which took place in St. Domingo.” Northerners “cannot, or will not, understand this state of things,” complained the editor.⁵³ To prevent such mayhem, slavery and white supremacy must be maintained at all costs.⁵⁴

When the Deep South formed the Confederate States of America in February 1861, the vice president of that new entity, Alexander H. Stephens, asserted that its

⁵¹ Manisha Sinha, The Counterrevolution of Slavery: Politics and Ideology in Antebellum South Carolina (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 214.

⁵² William Barney, The Road to Secession: A New Perspective on the Old South (New York: Praeger, 1972), 199.

⁵³ Charleston Mercury, n.d., quoted in Avery O. Craven, “The Fatal Predicament,” in Norman A. Graebner, ed., Politics and the Crisis of 1860 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961), 132.

⁵⁴ Ulrich B. Phillips, “The Central Theme of Southern History,” American Historical Review 34 (1928): 30-43; Charles B. Dew, Apostles of Disunion: Southern Secession Commissioners and the Causes of the Civil War (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 74-81; Kenneth M. Stampp, “The Irrepressible Conflict,” in Stampp, The Imperiled Union: Essays on the Background of the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 191-245; George Fredrickson, White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 150-62; Allen Nevins, The Emergence of Lincoln (2 vols.; New York: Scribner’s, 1950), 2:468-71.

“foundations are laid, its corner-stone 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 upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth.” Jefferson and the other Founding Fathers had based the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution “upon the assumption of the equality of races. This was an error.”⁵⁵ Stephens and many others maintained that white liberty required black slavery.⁵⁶ Another Georgian maintained shortly after his state had seceded that the “institution of African Slavery produced the Secession of the Cotton States. If it had never existed, the Union of the States would, to-day, be complete. But, by the existence of African Slavery in the Southern States, civilization has arrived at a degree of perfection equal to that of any age in the history of the world.”⁵⁷ Congressman Keitt declared at his state’s secession convention: “I am willing in this issue to rest disunion upon the question of slavery. It is the great central point from which we are now seceding.”⁵⁸ In Texas, the secession convention issued a Declaration of Causes condemning the Republicans as a party “based upon the unnatural feeling of hostility to these Southern States and their beneficent and patriarchal system of African slavery, proclaiming the debasing doctrine of the equality of all men, irrespective of race or color – a doctrine at war with nature, in opposition to the experience of

⁵⁵ Alexander H. Stephens, speech delivered in Savannah, Georgia, 21 March 1861, in Henry Cleveland, Alexander H. Stephens, in Public and Private with Letters and Speeches, Before, During, and Since the War (Philadelphia: National Publishing, 1866), 721.

⁵⁶ See J. William Harris, Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society: White Liberty and Black Slavery in Augusta’s Hinterlands (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1985).

⁵⁷ “A Slave Republic,” Atlanta Gate-City Guardian, 23 February 1861.

⁵⁸ Keitt quoted in Hans L. Trefousse, The Radical Republicans: Lincoln’s Vanguard for Racial Justice (New York: Knopf, 1969), 166.

mankind, and in violation of the plainest revelations of the Divine Law.”⁵⁹ A Confederate in Florida stated bluntly that the “very thing we are fighting for is the privilege of doing what we please with our niggers.”⁶⁰

Non-slaveholders rallied to defend the peculiar institution because it gave them an ego-enhancing sense of social superiority. As the master philosopher of Southern rights, John C. Calhoun, put it: “With us the two great divisions of society are not the rich and the poor, but the white and black; and all the former, the poor as well as the rich, belong to the upper class, and are respected and treated as equals, if honest and industrious; and hence have a position and pride of character of which neither poverty nor misfortune can deprive them.”⁶¹

Southerners thought it unmanly to bow to the Republicans’ prohibition on slavery into the territories. In mid-summer, John Bell had predicted that “the whole South, in 30 days after the election of ‘Lincoln’ would feel his election to be an insult to them.”⁶² They must have equal rights! They would not tolerate second-class citizenship! Too long had they endured criticism of their section and its peculiar institution!⁶³ “To deny us the right and privilege [of taking slaves into the territories] would be to deny us equality in the Union and would be a wrong and a degradation to which a high spirited people should

⁵⁹ “A Declaration of the Causes which Impel the State of Texas to Secede from the Federal Union,” in Billy D. Ledbetter, “Slavery, Fear, and Disunion in the Lone Star State: Texans Attitudes toward Secession and the Union, 1846-1861” (Ph.D. dissertation, North Texas State University, 1972), 284.

⁶⁰ New York Herald, 26 November 1861, in William Watson Davis, The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida (New York: Columbia University, 1913), 117.

⁶¹ Calhoun, senate speech of 12 August 1848, Richard Kenner Crallé, ed., The Works of John C. Calhoun (6 vols.; New York: D. Appleton, 1888), 4:505.

⁶² John Bell to Alexander Robinson Boteler, 30 July 1860, quoted in Joseph Howard Parks, John Bell of Tennessee (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950), 365.

⁶³ Arthur C. Cole, “Was Lincoln’s Election an Immediate Menace to Slavery in the South?” American Historical Review 36 (1931):762-67.

not submit,” declared a group of Mississippians in 1859.⁶⁴ (Slaves comprised 55% of the Magnolia State’s population.) Their governor, John Jones Pettus, averred that Republicans “attempted to degrade us . . . by denouncing us as barbarians, pirates, and robbers, unfit associates for Christian or civilized men.”⁶⁵ In urging secession, a Georgia editor in 1860 exhorted his neighbors: “Let us act like men. Let us be equals.”⁶⁶ “We were not born to be mastered, nor to submit to inferior position,” cried a Virginia newspaper.⁶⁷

In 1850, Mississippi Senator Jefferson Davis told his legislative colleagues that Southerners would become “an inferior class, a degraded class in the Union” if they were forbidden to take their slaves into the territories.⁶⁸ U.S. Supreme Court Justice Peter V. Daniel, a native of Virginia, had expressed this view succinctly in commenting on the 1846 Wilmot Proviso: “There is another aspect of this pretension now advanced, which exhibits it as fraught with dangers far greater than any that can flow from mere calculations of political influence, or profit, arising from a distribution of territory. It is that view of the case which pretends to an insulting exclusiveness or superiority on the one hand, and denounces a degrading inequality or inferiority on the other: which says in effect to the Southern man, Avaunt! You are not my equal and hence are to be excluded as carrying a moral taint with you. Here is at once the extinction of all fraternity, of all

⁶⁴ Weekly Democratic Advocate [no town indicated], 5 May 1859, in Christopher H. Olsen, Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi: Masculinity, Honor, and the Antiparty Tradition, 1830-1860 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 183.

⁶⁵ Pettus, speech to Mississippi legislature, 26 November 1860, in Olsen, Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi, 183.

⁶⁶ Columbus Times, quoted in Anthony Gene Carey, Politics, Slavery, and the Union in Antebellum Georgia (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 239.

⁶⁷ Clark County Journal, Virginia, 9 November, quoted in the New York Tribune, 13 November 1860.

⁶⁸ Speech of 13 February 1850, Congressional Globe, 31st Congress, 1st session, appendix, 149.

sympathy of all endurance even: the creation of animosity fierce, implacable, undying. It is the immitigable outrage, which I venture to say, there is no true Southron from the schoolboy to the octogenarian, who is not prepared for any extremity in order to repel it.”⁶⁹ At that same time, Robert Toombs of Georgia declared to Northerners that the right to carry slaves into the western territories “is worth a thousand such Unions as we have, even if they each were a thousand times more valuable than this Deprive us of our right and appropriate this common property to yourselves, it is then your government, not mine. Then I am its enemy, and I will then, if I can, bring my children and my constituents to the altar of liberty, and, like Hamilcar, I would swear them to eternal hostility to your foul domination.”⁷⁰

Secessionists agreed with Toombs; they would rather destroy the government than submit to it if it forbade them equal rights in the territories.⁷¹ That prohibition they termed, in the words of the leading fire-eater, William L. Yancey, “discrimination as degrading as it is injurious to the slaveholding states.”⁷² James H. Hammond of South Carolina favored secession rather than “submitting to gross insult.”⁷³ A Texas editor

⁶⁹ Daniel to Martin Van Buren, Richmond, 1 November 1847, Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress.

⁷⁰ Congressional Globe, 31st Congress, 1st session, 1216, in Alexander H. Stephens, A Constitutional View of the Late War between the States: Its Causes, Character, Conduct and Results, Presented in a Series of Colloquies at Liberty Hall (2 vols.; Philadelphia: National Publishing Company, 1868-70), 2:216. Cf. William Y. Thompson, Robert Toombs of Georgia (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), 42.

⁷¹ Olsen, Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi, 180-95; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, “Honor and Secession,” in Wyatt-Brown, Yankee Saints and Southern Sinners (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 183-213; Michael F. Holt, The Political Crisis of the 1850s (New York: Wiley, 1978), 223, 241-42; Kenneth S. Greenberg, Masters and Statesmen: The Political Culture of American Slavery (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 140-41; J. Miles Thornton III, Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 220, 226-27.

⁷² Clarence Phillips Denman, The Secession Movement in Alabama (Montgomery: Alabama State Department of Archives and History, 1933), 8.

⁷³ Sinha, Counterrevolution of Slavery, 232.

exclaimed: “The North has gone overwhelmingly for NEGRO EQUALITY and SOUTHERN VASSALAGE! Southern men, will you SUBMIT to this DEGRADATION?”⁷⁴

The Deep South sent commissioners to proselytize in the Upper South and the Border States. An Alabama secession commissioner, trying to persuade Kentucky to leave the Union, called Lincoln’s election “the last and crowning act of insult and outrage upon the people of the South.” Dramatically he predicted that if the Republicans carried out their announced policies “and the South submits, degradation and ruin must overwhelm alike all classes of citizens in the Southern States. The slave-holder and non-slave-holder must ultimately share the same fate; all be degraded to a position of equality with free negroes, stand side by side with them at the polls, and fraternize in all the social relations of life What Southern man, be he slave-holder or non-slave-holder, can without indignation and horror contemplate the triumph of negro equality, and see his own sons and daughters in the not distant future associating with free negroes upon terms of political and social equality, and the white man stripped by the heaven-daring hand of fanaticism of that title to superiority over the black race which God himself has bestowed? . . . Can Southern men submit to such degradation and ruin?”⁷⁵ A congressman from Alabama, where 45% of the residents were bondsmen, told a friend that he would “rather die a freeman than live a slave to Black Republicanism” and would either “be an equal, or a corpse.”⁷⁶ Robert Barnwell of South Carolina warned that “[w]e

⁷⁴ Corsicana Navarro Express, 16 November 1860, in Ledbetter, “Slavery, Fear, and Disunion in the Lone Star State,” 228.

⁷⁵ Stephen F. Hale to Beriah Magoffin, Frankfort, Kentucky, 27 December 1860, in Dew, Apostles of Disunion, 96, 98-99.

⁷⁶ David Clopton to C. C. Clay, 13 December 1860, Clay Papers, Duke University, quoted in William J. Cooper, Jr., “The Politics of Slavery Affirmed: The South and the Secession Crisis,” in The Southern

must become a degraded people unless slavery is upheld as a political institution essential to the preservation of our civilization.”⁷⁷ A fellow South Carolinian, William Porcher Miles, declared that accepting restrictions on slavery expansion would put the “seal of inferiority” on Southerners and brand them “as those who from perverse moral obliquity are not entitled to the enjoyment of full participation in the common goods and property of the Republic.”⁷⁸ Echoing him was Texas Senator Louis Wigfall, who told his colleagues from the North: “You denounce us, degrade us, deride us, tell us . . . that we are degraded, that we are not your equals.”⁷⁹ An Alabamian observed that accepting restrictions on slavery expansion was tantamount to admitting “that a free citizen of Massachusetts was a better man and entitled to more privileges than a free citizen of Alabama.” He asked the voters of his state: “Will you submit to be bridled and saddled and rode under whip and spur?” or instead demand to be treated in accordance with “the great doctrine of Equality: Opposition to ascendancy in any form, either of classes, by way of monopolies, or of sections, by means of robbery.”⁸⁰ Calhoun’s 1849 “Address of the Southern Delegates in Congress to Their Constituents” protested that exclusion of slavery from the territories would demote Southerners “from being equals, into a subordinate and dependent condition.”⁸¹ Calhoun asserted: “I am a Southern man and a slaveholder – a kind and merciful one, I trust – and none the worse for being a

Enigma: Essays on Race, Class, and Folk Culture, ed. Walter J. Fraser, Jr. and Winfred B. Moore, Jr. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983), 204.

⁷⁷ Channing, Crisis of Fear, 66.

⁷⁸ William Porcher Miles, Oration Delivered Before the Fourth of July Association (Charleston, 1849), quoted in Walther, Fire-Eaters, 274.

⁷⁹ Congressional Globe, 36th Congress, 2nd session, 74, 667, in Eric H. Walther, The Fire Eaters (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 179.

⁸⁰ “Burleigh,” in the Montgomery Advertiser, 25 June 1851, in Thornton, Politics and Power in a Slave Society, 58.

⁸¹ Crallé, ed., Works of Calhoun, 6:304.

slaveholder. I say, for one, I would rather meet any extremity upon earth than give up one inch of our equality – one inch of what belongs to us as members of this republic. What! acknowledge inferiority! The surrender of life is nothing to sinking down into acknowledged inferiority!”⁸² Alexander H. Stephens issued a public letter alleging that any exclusion of slavery from the territories “would be in direct violation of the rights of the Southern people to an equal participation” in those lands “and in open derogation of the equality between the states of the South and the North which should never be surrendered by the South.”⁸³

The South took offense at several other criticisms. In 1850, an Alabama newspaper protested against “the unwillingness of Northern men to sit around the same altars with Southern men – the denunciations of us by the press and the people of the North – the false slanders circulated in their periodicals and reviews – the rending of churches for a theoretical sentiment, and then appropriating to their use what they sanctimoniously call the price of blood.” These slights “have alienated the two sections of a common country, and would alone, at some future day, terminate in a dissolution of the union.”⁸⁴ The hurt feelings of the South were illustrated by a New Orleans editor, who proclaimed that his region “has been moved to resistance chiefly . . . by the popular dogma in the free states that slavery is a crime in the sight of GOD. The South in the eyes

⁸² Speech in the U.S. Senate, 19 February 1847, *ibid.*, 4:348.

⁸³ Stephens to the editor of the *Federal Union*, Clinton, Georgia, 30 August 1848, in Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, ed., *The Correspondence of Robert Toombs, Alexander H. Stephens, and Howell Cobb* (Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1911; 2 vols.; Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913), 2:118.

⁸⁴ *Jackson County Democrat*, n.d., copied in the Montgomery *Advertiser*, 2 October 1850, in Thornton, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society*, 220.

of the North, is degraded and unworthy, because of the institution of servitude.”⁸⁵

Louisiana Senator Judah P. Benjamin denounced “the incessant attack of the Republicans, not simply on the interests, but on the feelings and sensibilities of a high-spirited people by the most insulting language, and the most offensive epithets.”⁸⁶

The South also feared losing power. Strong though the desire to attain power may have been, the dread of having it taken away was stronger still, especially if that loss imperiled slavery.⁸⁷ Charles Francis Adams believed that the “question is one of power. And nothing short of a surrender of everything gained by the election will avail.” The secessionists “want to continue to rule.” Their “true grievance and the only one is the loss of power.”⁸⁸ Another diarist, Sidney George Fisher of Philadelphia, concurred: “The southern people are arrogant and self-willed. They have been accustomed generally to govern the country, always to have large influence in the government. They cannot bear to lose power, and to submit to the control of the North.”⁸⁹ The New York Tribune argued that the great complaints of the South included the “loss of sixty years’ monopoly of the Government, its military and civil offices” and “the loss of prestige and power by the old political parties, and their humiliated leaders.”⁹⁰ On November 16, 1860, the

⁸⁵ Unidentified quote in Charles G. Sellers, “Comment on Avery O. Craven, “Why the Southern States Seceded,” George Harmon Knoles, ed., The Crisis of the Union, 1860-1861 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 89.

⁸⁶ Congressional Globe, 36th Congress, 2nd session, 212 (31 December 1860).

⁸⁷ Roy F. Nichols, The Stakes of Power, 1845-1877 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961), x; Roy Franklin Nichols, The Disruption of American Democracy (New York: Macmillan, 1948), 352-53; Nevins, Emergence of Lincoln, 2:466-67.

⁸⁸ Charles Francis Adams to E. Farnsworth, Washington, 9 December 1860, letterpress copy, Adams Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society; Adams to Richard Henry Dana, Washington, 23 December 1860, Dana Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁸⁹ A Philadelphia Perspective: The Diary of Sidney George Fisher Covering the Years, 1834-1871, ed. Nicholas B. Wainwright (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1967), 1:371 (entry for 25 November 1860).

⁹⁰ New York Tribune, 26 February 1861.

Augusta, Georgia, Constitutionalist said that the South regarded the American flag as “the emblem of a gigantic power, soon to pass into the hands of that sworn enemy, and knows that African slavery, though panoplied by the Federal Government, is doomed to a war of extermination. All the powers of a Government which has so long sheltered it will be turned to its destruction. The only hope for its preservation, therefore, is out of the Union.”⁹¹

As members of a traditional society, Southerners resented the modernizing Northerners, whose watchwords were “improvement” and “progress.” Below the Mason-Dixon line, new economic, social, intellectual, and cultural trends enjoyed little favor; innovation and reform, highly prized in the North, were suspect in the South. The Southern revolt against the Union represents, among other things, a chapter in the long history of traditionalist resistance to modernization.⁹² “We are an agricultural people,” a Southerner explained to an English visitor; “we are a primitive but civilized people. We have no cities – we don’t want them. We have no literature – we don’t need any yet. We have no press – we are glad of it.”⁹³

Secessionists scoffed at Stephen A. Douglas, Alexander H. Stephens and others who argued that Lincoln could do little harm because his party did not control Congress. They replied that Republicans would sooner or later dominate the House of Representatives and eventually the senate and the supreme court; in the meantime, the

⁹¹ Dwight Lowell Dumond, ed., Southern Editorials on Secession (New York: Century, 1931), 242.

⁹² James M. McPherson, Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction (3rd ed.; Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2001), chapter 1; Richard D. Brown, Modernization: The Transformation of American Life, 1600-1865 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), 122-58; Foner, Free Soil, 11-27; Wilbur J. Cash, The Mind of the South (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1941). Avery O. Craven declared that “the much sought for ‘central theme of Southern history’ is, and always has been, a proud reluctance to being pushed into the modern world.” Craven, “Why the Southern States Seceded,” Knoles, ed., The Crisis of the Union, 80n.

⁹³ William H. Russell, My Diary North and South (2 vols.; New York: T. O. H. P. Burnham, 1863), 71 (entry for 8 May 1861).

new administration could undermine slavery with its appointment power.⁹⁴ Congressman Henry W. Hilliard of Alabama explained that it “is not any apprehension of aggressive action on the part of the incoming administration which rouses the southern people to resistance, but it is the demonstration which Mr Lincoln’s election by such overwhelming majorities affords, of the supremacy of a sentiment hostile to slavery in the non-slaveholding states of the Union.”⁹⁵ A reapportionment of House based on the 1860 census would give the North almost two thirds of the seats in that chamber.⁹⁶ Even a Unionist journal like the New Orleans Picayune alleged that the Republicans “will be the most moderate of national men in their professions, without abating a jot of the ultimate purpose of forcing the extinction of slavery. . . . It is for these future, progressing, insidious, fatal results, more than from an ‘overt act’ of direct oppression, that the triumph of Black Republicanism . . . is to be profoundly deprecated by every Southern man of every shade of party opinion.”⁹⁷

Some slaveholders feared that Lincoln would appoint local non-slaveholders to office and thus create a Republican party in the South threatening Democratic hegemony. “The prospective development of a Republican party among the non-slaveholding whites of the South . . . is the great grievance,” said the New York Tribune. Poorer farmers and

⁹⁴ Public letter by William Boyce, 3 August, Charleston, S.C., Daily Courier, 8 August 1860, in Channing, Crisis of Fear, 235; Don E. Fehrenbacher, Lincoln in Text and Context: Collected Essays (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 61-62; Potter, Impending Crisis, 477-78.

⁹⁵ Letter by Hilliard, n.p., n.d., quoted in the Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican, 1 January 1861.

⁹⁶ Rochester Union and Advertiser, 11 February 1861, in Howard Cecil Perkins, ed., Northern Editorials on Secession (2 vols.; New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1942), 1:315.

⁹⁷ New Orleans Picayune, 8 September 1860, quoted in Donald E. Reynolds, Editors Make War: Southern Newspapers in the Secession Crisis (Nashville, Vanderbilt University Press, 1970), 214-15.

artisans might combine to displace the planter elite.⁹⁸ But divisions among whites in the Deep South were minor compared with their overwhelming agreement on the need to protect slavery at all costs.

On election night, when the first ominous rumblings of secessionism reached Springfield – a report that James Chesnut and James H. Hammond of South Carolina had resigned their U.S. senate seats – it “sent a disagreeable chill” through most of Lincoln’s friends but not through him. “There are plenty left,” he remarked, alluding to the other sixty-four senators. “A little while ago I saw a couple of shooting stars fall down, hissing and sputtering. Plenty left for many a bright night.”⁹⁹ Soon thereafter, Elihu B. Washburne found Lincoln “in fine spirits and excellent health, and quite undisturbed by the blustering of the disunionists and traitors.”¹⁰⁰ An Ohio journalist recalled that the president-elect “considered the movement [in the] South as a sort of political game of bluff, gotten up by politicians, and meant solely to frighten the North. He believed that when the leaders saw their efforts in that direction [i.e., of secession] were unavailing, the tumult would subside.” Lincoln predicted that they “won’t give up the offices. Were it believed that vacant places could be had at the North Pole, the road there would be lined with dead Virginians.”¹⁰¹ In September he had stated that there were “no real disunionists

⁹⁸ “The Real Grievances of the Slaveholders,” New York Tribune, 26 February 1861; Nichols, Disruption of the American Democracy, 352-53; Michael P. Johnson, Toward a Patriarchal Republic: The Secession of Georgia (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 43-44; Channing, Crisis of Fear, 235-36.

⁹⁹ Article by the New York Tribune’s correspondent, Edward H. House, New York Sun, undated clipping, [probably 1883], Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne. Chesnut resigned his seat on November 10; Hammond followed his lead soon thereafter. Sinha, Counterrevolution of Slavery, 229.

¹⁰⁰ Elihu B. Washburne to his wife, [Galena], 14 November 1860, Washburn Family Papers, Washburn Memorial Library, Norlands, Maine. Washburne had spent the night of November 12 at the Lincolns’ house.

¹⁰¹ Donn Piatt, Memories of the Men Who Saved the Union (New York: Belford, Clarke, 1887), 30.

in the country.”¹⁰² He told his law partner that “he could not in his heart believe that the South designed the overthrow of the Government.”¹⁰³ Ward Hill Lamon recalled that throughout the winter, “Lincoln had been slow to realize or to acknowledge, even to himself, the awful gravity of the situation, and the danger that the gathering clouds portended.”¹⁰⁴ On election eve, he explained to a *Washingtonian* “that in his part of the country, when a man came among them they were in the habit of giving him a fair trial.” That “was all he desired from the South,” which “had always professed to be law-abiding and constitution-loving; placing their reliance on the constitution and the laws.” As president, he would make sure that “these should be sustained to the fullest extent.”¹⁰⁵ The following month, when a visitor asked whether Lincoln thought the Southern states would secede, he expressed doubt: “I do not think they will. A number from different sections of the South pass through here daily, and all that call appear pleasant and seem to go away apparently satisfied, and if they only give me an opportunity I will convince them that I do not wish to interfere with them in any way, but protect them in everything that they are entitled to.” With eyes flashing, he added a caveat: “If they do [secede], the question will be [posed], and it must be settled come what may.”¹⁰⁶ To a Tennessean he

¹⁰² Springfield correspondence, 4 September, New York *Evening Post*, 8 September 1860.

¹⁰³ William H. Herndon and Jesse W. Weik, *Herndon's Lincoln*, ed. Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis (1889; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), p?*

¹⁰⁴ Ward Hill Lamon, *Recollections of Abraham Lincoln, 1847-1865*, 2nd ed., ed. Dorothy Lamon Teillard (Washington, D.C.: Privately published, 1911), 69.

¹⁰⁵ A lumber merchant of Washington in the *Washington Star*, n.d., copied in the New York *Evening Post*, 15 November 1860.

¹⁰⁶ David M. Swarr to John G. Nicolay and John Hay, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1 November 1886, Nicolay Papers, Library of Congress.

declared that “to execute the laws is all that I shall attempt to do. This, however, I will do, no matter how much force may be required.”¹⁰⁷

Lincoln’s optimism rested not only on the information derived from visitors and newspapers but also on his interpretation of the election results.¹⁰⁸ In the Slave States, Breckinridge, whose candidacy was widely interpreted as pro-secession (although the nominee himself repudiated disunionism), received only 44% of the vote. Together, Bell and Douglas, who opposed secession, won 110,000 more Southern votes than Breckinridge.¹⁰⁹ Bell carried Virginia with 44% of the ballots cast, Tennessee with 48%, Kentucky with 45%, and nearly won North Carolina with 47%, Maryland with 45.15% (to Breckinridge’s 45.92%), and Missouri with 35.3% (to Douglas’s 35.5%). In those states, as Henry Adams colorfully put it, old Whigs “had grown up to despise a Democrat as the meanest and most despicable of creatures” and “had been taught in the semi-barbarous school of southern barbecues and stump harangues, gouging and pistol shooting, to hate and abhor the very word Democrat with a bitterness unknown to the quieter and more law-abiding northerners.” For them, “the idea of submitting finally and hopelessly to the Democratic rule, was not to be endured.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Reminiscences of Parmenas Taylor Turnley, from the Cradle to Three Score and Ten (Chicago: Donohue & Henneberry, 1892), 10.

¹⁰⁸ “The Strength of Secession,” New York Tribune, 28 November 1860; Potter, Lincoln and His Party, 208.

¹⁰⁹ This figure does not include South Carolina, where the state legislature rather than the voters chose presidential electors. Breckinridge may well have received 50,000 votes in the Palmetto State. In the Deep South, Breckinridge voters often, but not always, cast ballots for secessionist candidates in elections for special state conventions to consider the crisis. Peyton McCrary, Clark Miller, and Dale Baum, “Class and Party in the Secession Crisis: Voting Behavior in the Deep South, 1856-1861,” Journal of Interdisciplinary History 8 (1978): 429-57. In fact, many Southern Constitutional Unionists were as committed to slavery as were the Breckinridge Democrats. John V. Mering, “The Slave-State Constitutional Unionists and the Politics of Consensus,” Journal of Southern History 43 (1977): 395-410.

¹¹⁰ Henry Adams, The Great Secession Winter of 1860-61, and Other Essays, ed. George Hochfield (New York: Sagamore Press, 1958), 15.

In the months following the election, Lincoln took heart from the strong Unionist sentiment in the Upper South states of Virginia, North Carolina, Arkansas, and Tennessee, as well as the Border States of Kentucky, Missouri, Delaware, and Maryland, where slaves were less numerous and Whiggish sentiments and organizations more persistent than they were in the Deep South. The white population of the Slave States was pretty evenly divided among the Deep South (2,629,000), the Upper South (2,828,000), and the Border States (2,589,000.)¹¹¹ Unionists doubted that economic benefits were to be gained by joining a Southern confederacy; regarded leading secessionists as delusional conspirators irresponsibly frightening their neighbors; feared that Southern misunderstanding of the Northern intentions might lead to hostilities; and thought that the Republicans could end that misunderstanding. A few of these men, like Andrew Johnson of Tennessee, were Unconditional Unionists, whose loyalty to the nation depended on no concessions by the Republicans; most of them were Conditional Unionists, who would eschew secession as long as the federal government took no aggressive action against the seceders and as long as the Republicans demonstrated some willingness to compromise.¹¹²

Lincoln was not unrealistic in imagining that the Upper South and Border States might remain in the Union. After all, the Deep South had threatened to secede in 1832-33, in 1850-51, and in 1856; as recently as 1859-60, South Carolina, Alabama, and Mississippi had failed to win support for disunion.¹¹³ William B. Campbell, ex-governor of Tennessee, warned hotheads in the Lower South that secession was “unwise and

¹¹¹ Abrahamson, Men of Secession and Civil War, 85.

¹¹² Crofts, Reluctant Confederates, 104-63; Olsen, Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi, 181.

¹¹³ Sinha, Counterrevolution of Slavery, 33-123, 187-220; Potter, Lincoln and His Party, 15-16.

impolitic” because it would hasten “the ruin and overthrow of negro slavery” and put at risk “the freedom and liberty of the white men.” Campbell, who blamed cynical politicians for frightening the Deep South into secession, predicted that Kentucky and Tennessee could not be “dragged into a rebellion that their whole population utterly disapproved.”¹¹⁴ A Louisianan expressed puzzlement at the reluctance of the Upper South to join the Cotton States in seceding: “Is it not strange, when the border states suffer so much more from Northern fanaticism, from actual loss in their property, and these same states equally interested in slavery, that a feeling of antagonism to the North, should be so much stronger [in the Deep South].”¹¹⁵ The highly respected legal scholar Bartholomew F. Moore of North Carolina predicted that secession would intensify antislavery agitation, extinguish Southern claims to the western territories, dash hopes of expansion in the Caribbean and Central America, and cause a hemorrhage of runaway slaves.¹¹⁶

Some North Carolina Unionists feared that their state would secede after an initial reluctance to follow the lead of their immediate neighbor. “We the Union men will make a firm resistance,” predicted Thomas K. Thomas, “but the bad element in our State will overcome us – sooner or later.”¹¹⁷

In Lincoln’s view, reasonable Southerners understood that nothing had occurred, including his election, which would justify secession.¹¹⁸ The Southern grievance most

¹¹⁴ William B. Campbell to A. C. Beard, 15 March 1861, quoted in Crofts, Reluctant Confederates, xvi.

¹¹⁵ William M. Clark to Lewis Thompson, 10 January 1861, in Crofts, Reluctant Confederates, xvi; Abrahamson, Men of Secession and Civil War, 149.

¹¹⁶ Raleigh Register, 22 October 1860, in Crofts, Reluctant Confederates, 80.

¹¹⁷ Thomas K. Thomas to Henry C. Carey, Louisburg, 3 November 1860, Carey Papers in the Gardiner Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

¹¹⁸ See Cole, “Was Lincoln’s Election an Immediate Menace to Slavery in the South?” 740-67.

often cited was insufficiently rigorous enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act.¹¹⁹ But very few slaves escaped from the South; in 1860, there were only 803, constituting less than one-fiftieth of 1% of the slave population, and most of those fled from the Border States, not the Deep South, where disunionist sentiment prevailed. Privately, Southerners acknowledged that in practical terms, “Personal Liberty Bills are of no importance at all.”¹²⁰ To Southerners, the psychological cost was greater than the economic. “The loss of property is felt, the loss of honor is felt still more,” said Virginia Senator James M. Mason.¹²¹ Some Southerners argued that if their region were to secede, the Border States would become Free States within a decade, for the danger of slaves “escaping across the line where they could never be recovered would cause them to be run further South and in all probability it would not be long before the same cause would exist for a dissolution of the Southern confederacy that now is said to exist for breaking up the old one.”¹²²

To a group of Kentuckians, Lincoln pointed out that during the nullification controversy of 1832-1833, “the South made a special complaint against a law of recent origin [i.e., the tariff of 1828] – Now they had no new law – or new interpretation of [an] old law to complain of – no specialty whatever, nothing but the naked desire to go out of the Union.”¹²³ If secessionists were to await passage of such a statute before acting, or for

¹¹⁹ “The Southern Grievance,” New York Tribune, 28 November 1860.

¹²⁰ Justin S. Morrill to Stephen Thomas, Washington, 23 December 1860, draft, Morrill Papers, Library of Congress.

¹²¹ Nevins, Emergence of Lincoln, 2:489.

¹²² Jacob Hanes to Enock Faro, Clemmonsville, North Carolina, 15 November 1860, Lincoln Collection, Brown University.

¹²³ Thomas B. Webster, Jr., to John Sherman, St. Louis, 15 November 1860, Sherman Papers, Library of Congress.

any other “aggressive” action, “they would never go out of the Union,” he predicted.¹²⁴

Many Northerners shared Lincoln’s view. In August, Seward had told an audience in Minnesota that “the slave power . . . rails now with a feeble voice, instead of thundering as it did in our ears for twenty or thirty years past. With a feeble and muttering voice they cry out that they will tear the Union to pieces. They complain that if we will not surrender our principles, and our system, and our right, being a majority, to rule, and if we will not accept their system and such rulers as they will give us, they will go out of the Union. ‘Who’s afraid?’ Nobody’s afraid.”¹²⁵ Long John Wentworth called the secession threat “the old game which has been used time and time again to scare the North into submission to Southern demands and Southern tyranny.”¹²⁶ John Bigelow advised an English friend that the South’s threats were uttered “with the faint hope of frightening Lincoln into a modification of the Republican policy and the concession of a Cabinet Minister to the Fire Eaters.”¹²⁷ In 1856, James Buchanan observed to a fellow Democrat: “We have so often cried ‘wolf,’ that now when the wolf is at the door, it is difficult to make the people believe it.”¹²⁸

Many Northerners regarded the secessionists as spoiled children who needed discipline. “Our stock of quieting sugar plums, in the shape of compromises, is about

¹²⁴ Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 20 December, Cincinnati Commercial, 24 December 1860.

¹²⁵ George E. Baker, ed., The Works of William H. Seward (5 vols.; Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1884), 4:344.

¹²⁶ Chicago Democrat, 27 July 1860, copied in the New York Herald, 1 August 1860.

¹²⁷ John Bigelow to William Hargraves, New York, 10 November 1860, Bigelow Papers, New York Public Library. Bigelow recollected that “I scoffed at the threats of disunion which reached us from Charleston and Mississippi. They never cast a shadow on my brow.” John Bigelow, Retrospections of an Active Life (5 vols.; New York: Baker & Taylor, 1909-13), 1:290.

¹²⁸ James Buchanan to Nahum Capen, Wheatland, 27 August 1856, in John Bassett Moore, ed., The Works of James Buchanan (12 vols.; Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1908-11), 10:88.

exhausted, and the fretful child is as insubordinate as ever,” remarked the Evansville, Indiana, Journal scornfully. If “the little rebel” (South Carolina) did not calm down but remained “insubordinate,” then “a well-administered spanking may be productive of good.”¹²⁹ Another Hoosier recommended that the Palmetto State be “sunk out of sight – and a dead Sea cover the place where she stood.”¹³⁰ William M. Reynolds, president of Illinois University, felt that it was “not now a question whether the South shall extend negro slavery down to the Isthmus, but whether the freemen of the North are to be mere vassals & tools to register their decrees.”¹³¹

Not everyone in the North agreed with this assessment. In the month after the election, as legislatures in the Deep South authorized secession conventions, some Republican editors, including Henry J. Raymond, James Watson Webb, and Thurlow Weed, recommended conciliatory gestures.¹³² On November 14, Raymond urged that Congress compensate slaveholders for runaways escaping to the North; later he called for the repeal of Personal Liberty Laws, tougher enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act, and for measures allowing slavery to expand.¹³³ Webb’s New York Courier and Enquirer endorsed the restoration of the Missouri Compromise line.¹³⁴ Weed also ran editorials questioning the need for Personal Liberty Laws and asking “why not restore the Missouri

¹²⁹ Evansville Daily Journal, 13 November 1860, quoted in Elmer Duane Elbert, “Southern Indiana Politics on the Eve of the Civil War, 1858-1861” (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1967), 164.

¹³⁰ A conversation overheard in Indianapolis, in George B. Lincoln to Schuyler Colfax, Chicago, 29 December 1860, Lincoln Collection, Brown University.

¹³¹ William M. Reynolds to Edward McPherson, Springfield, 12 February 1861, McPherson Papers, Library of Congress.

¹³² Potter, Lincoln and His Party, 75-77, 128.

¹³³ New York Times, 14, 22 November 1860.

¹³⁴ New York Courier and Enquirer, n.d., copied in the Albany Evening Journal, 8 December 1860; James L. Crouthamel, James Watson Webb: A Biography (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 146.

Compromise Line? That secured to the South all Territory adapted, by Soil and Climate, to its ‘peculiar institution.’”¹³⁵ Weed doubtless spoke for Seward, who had consulted with him on November 15.¹³⁶ After interviewing Lord Thurlow, a journalist described him as “the most dangerous foe to Liberty that lives in the country. He is either scared to death or a bought traitor. . . . Seward is a Jesuit. He will keep his record tolerably clean – probably, but is hand & glove with Weed of course, & I sincerely believe secretly encourages a compromise though they will not give it that name. They call it making up a good record against secession. They do not expect to prevent secession.”¹³⁷

In response to these compromise trial balloons, Lincoln expressed surprise that “any Republican could think, for a moment, of abandoning in the hour of victory, though in the face of danger, every point involved in the recent contest.”¹³⁸ From Springfield, Henry Villard reported that the “true motives of the voluntary backsliding of certain New York journals are . . . well understood out here. The throbs of Wall street are known to have produced certain sudden pangs of contrition. But Mr. Lincoln is above bulling and bearing. Although conservative in his intentions, and anxious to render constitutional justice to all sections of the country, he is possessed of too much nobleness and sense of duty to quail before threats and lawlessness. He knows well enough that the first step

¹³⁵ “Personal Liberty Laws” and “From Georgia,” Albany Evening Journal, 19 and 24 November 1860; Glyndon Van Deusen, Thurlow Weed: Wizard of the Lobby (Boston: Little Brown, 1947), 266-67.

¹³⁶ Seward to Weed, Auburn, 15 November 1860, telegram, Weed Papers, University of Rochester. The knowledgeable Henry Adams believed “that all Weed’s motions, compromises and all, have been feelers on Seward’s part.” Henry Adams to Charles Francis Adams, Jr., Washington, 24 January 1861, in J. C. Levenson, ed., The Letters of Henry Adams (6 vols.; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982-1988), 1:225. Seward unconvincingly denied that he had inspired Weed’s editorials. Potter, Lincoln and His Party, 83-86, 165-66; Albany Evening Journal, 19 December 1860.

¹³⁷ Joseph R. Hawley to his father, Washington, 7 January 1861, Hawley Papers, Library of Congress.

¹³⁸ George G. Fogg heard him utter these words in response to the New York Tribune’s denunciation of Weed’s editorials. Fogg to Horace Greeley, St. Louis, 1 December 1860, Greeley Papers, Library of Congress.

backward on his part, or that of his supporters, will be followed by a corresponding advance on the part of the cotton rebels, and he knows that for every inch yielded, a foot will be demanded.”¹³⁹ (In fact, commercial interests in New York eagerly sought to appease the South.)¹⁴⁰

These journalistic peace feelers ignited a debate which exacerbated tension within the Republican party between the Conservatives, who favored some kind of compromise, and the “stiff-backed” Radicals, who believed that “[t]o be frightened by threats of war, & bloodshed is the part of children.”¹⁴¹ The latter included Pennsylvania Congressman Thaddeus Stevens, who said: “I do not blame the gentlemen from the South . . . for the language of intimidation, for using this threat of rending God’s creation from the turret to the foundation. All this is right in them, for they have tried it fifty times, and fifty times they have found weak and recreant tremblers in the North who have been affected by it, and who have acted from those intimidations.”¹⁴² In Congress’s upper chamber, Henry Wilson of Massachusetts echoed that view, arguing that disunion threats had been able to “startle and appal[l] the timid, make the servility of the servile still more abject, [and] rouse the selfish instincts of . . . nerveless conservatism.”¹⁴³ Two weeks after the election, Horace Greeley declared that most Southerners had no desire to break up the Union:

¹³⁹ Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, Cincinnati Commercial, n.d., copied in the New York Evening Post, 17 December 1860.

¹⁴⁰ Philip S. Foner, Business and Slavery: The New York Merchants and the Irrepressible Conflict (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941), 208-96.

¹⁴¹ Richard C. Parsons to John Sherman, Cleveland, 12 December 1860, John Sherman Papers, Library of Congress. See Van Deusen, Weed, 266-67; Hans L. Trefousse, The Radical Republicans: Lincoln’s Vanguard for Racial Justice (New York: Knopf, 1968), 137-67; Potter, Lincoln and His Party, 20-44, 63-74; Patrick Michael Sowle, “The Conciliatory Republicans during the Winter of Secession” (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1963), passim; Stamp, And the War Came, 13-178.

¹⁴² Congressional Globe, 36th Congress 1st session, part 1, 24 (6 December 1859).

¹⁴³ Ibid., 572 (25 January 1860).

“They simply mean to bully the Free States into concessions which they can exult over as neutralizing the election of Lincoln.”¹⁴⁴ The Chicago Tribune also suspected that the people of the South were bluffing and predicted that when they realized that the North could not be browbeaten into compromising its principles, “they will probably return to their fealty to the Union.”¹⁴⁵

Some stiff-backs did not quail at the prospect of war. “Without a little blood-letting, this Union will not, in my estimation, be worth a rush,” wrote Michigan Senator Zachariah Chandler in February.¹⁴⁶ Chandler had earlier insisted that “we are men of Peace but will whip disunionists into Subjection, the moment the first overt act of treason is perpetrated. Halters & not compromises are now needed & like certain very pungent medicines, a very little will answer.”¹⁴⁷ He would “rather see every master in South Carolina hanged & Charleston burned, than to see one line from Mr Lincoln to appease them in advance of his inaugural.”¹⁴⁸ A leading Republican activist in Freeport, Illinois, told his congressman that if a “collision must come, let it; if blood must flow, it is better that it should, better, ten fold better that a million lives be sacrificed . . . than self government and free society be an admitted failure.”¹⁴⁹ Gustave Koerner asserted that the “spilling of blood in a civil war often cements a better Union. History is full of such

¹⁴⁴ New York Tribune, 20 November 1860.

¹⁴⁵ Chicago Tribune, 27 November 1860.

¹⁴⁶ Chandler to Austin Blair, Washington, 11 February 1861, Congressional Globe, 36th Congress, 2nd session, 1247 (27 February 1861). This letter had been leaked by one Sam Cook. Austin Blair to Chandler, Lansing, 27 February 1861, Chandler Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁴⁷ Z. Chandler to James Watson Webb, Washington, 20 February 1858, James Watson Webb Papers, Yale University.

¹⁴⁸ Z. Chandler to Lyman Trumbull, Detroit, 13 November 1860, Trumbull Family Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

¹⁴⁹ Smith D. Atkins to Elihu B. Washburne, Rockford, Illinois, 15 February 1861, Washburne Papers, Library of Congress.

examples.”¹⁵⁰ Koerner told Lincoln that if the South seceded “he should call into the field at once several hundred thousand militia” and pointed out that when a few cantons of Switzerland had recently seceded and mustered 40,000 troops, the government had met with challenge with 100,000 soldiers, whose numbers overawed the disunionists and led to a bloodless restoration of national unity.¹⁵¹ In central Illinois, William Herndon reported that the watchword was: “War bloody and exterminating rather than secession or Disunion.”¹⁵² In 1857, Herndon had written that if “the South will tap the dinner gong and call the wild, bony, quick, brave Peoples to a feast of civil war, and make this land quiver and ring from center to circumference, – then I can but say, – ‘the quicker the better.’”¹⁵³ Iowa Senator James W. Grimes predicted in December that “war of a most bitter and sanguinary character will be sure to follow in a short time. . . . This is certainly deplorable, but there is no help for it. No reasonable concession will satisfy the rebels.”¹⁵⁴ In Indiana, the Terre Haute Wabash Express believed that “if this Union is not worth fighting for, it is not worth having.” When South Carolina seceded, Hoosier Republicans were urged to “‘whip her into the traces’ if she commits any ‘overt act.’ The ‘appeal’ of gun powder and cold steel is the kind to make to disunion traitors.”¹⁵⁵ Said the Indiana American: “we are heartily tired of having this [secession] threat stare us in the face

¹⁵⁰ Gustave Koerner to Lyman Trumbull, Belleville, 10 December 1860, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁵¹ Koerner, Memoirs, 2:108-9.

¹⁵² Herndon to Lyman Trumbull, Springfield, 21 December 1860, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁵³ Herndon to Theodore Parker, Springfield, 10 March 1857, Herndon-Parker Papers, University of Iowa. See also Herndon to Wendell Phillips, Springfield, 9 March 1857, Phillips Papers, Harvard University.

¹⁵⁴ Grimes to his wife, Washington, 16 December 1860, in William Salter, The Life of James W. Grimes, Governor of Iowa, 1854-1858; A Senator of the United States, 1859-1869 (New York: Appleton, 1876), 133-34.

¹⁵⁵ Elbert, “Southern Indiana Politics on the Eve of the Civil War,” 164-65.

evermore. If nothing but blood will prevent it, let it flow.”¹⁵⁶ An Ohio Democrat announced that he would rather “see a Civil war, a Fratricidal war, engaged in and fought out than to see the government converted into a supple pro-slavery bloodhound.”¹⁵⁷

The much less sanguinary Moderates disagreed about which concessions to offer the South. Some were out-and-out appeasers, willing to abandon the Chicago platform by allowing slavery to expand into the territories. On December 18, the chief spokesman for this approach, John J. Crittenden of Kentucky, the seventy-two-year-old Nestor of the senate, introduced a comprehensive package of six irrevocable constitutional amendments and four supplementary resolutions. They included a variation on Weed’s suggestion that the Missouri Compromise line be extended to California; under Crittenden’s plan, slavery would be protected south of 36° 30’ during the territorial stage, and any further states would be admitted to the Union with or without slavery as its people saw fit. This would apply to existing territories and to any that might be acquired later. Other amendments stipulated that Congress could not abolish slavery in federal facilities; nor could it abolish slavery in Washington without the consent of the voters, without compensation to owners, and as long as the peculiar institution persisted in Virginia and Maryland; nor could Congress outlaw the interstate slave trade or the transportation of slaves across state lines; owners whose slaves successfully fled to the North would be compensated for their losses; and finally, no future amendments could

¹⁵⁶ Indianapolis Indiana American, 21 November 1860, in Perkins, ed., Northern Editorials on Secession, 1:97.

¹⁵⁷ John Haywood to S. S. Cox, Westerville, Ohio, 2 January 1861, Cox Papers, Brown University.

undo these protections for slavery.¹⁵⁸ Of the ten items in the package, only one was a concession to the antislavery forces.

Most Republicans understandably thought this represented “no compromise at all, but a total surrender of every principle for which the Republicans and Douglas Democrats contended, in connexion with the subject of slavery, during the last Presidential canvass,” as the Evansville, Indiana, Journal put it.¹⁵⁹ Iowa Senator James W. Grimes thought the Crittenden Compromise asked Republicans “to surrender all of our cherished ideas on the subject of slavery, and agree, in effect, to provide a slave code for the Territories south of 36 deg. 30 min. and for the Mexican provinces as soon as they shall be brought within our jurisdiction. It is demanded of us that we shall consent to change the Constitution into a genuine pro-slavery instrument, and to convert the government into a great slave-breeding, slavery-extending empire.”¹⁶⁰ (In fact, Southern expansionists in the 1850s had dreamed of establishing a Caribbean slave empire and undertook freebooting missions to carry out that scheme.)¹⁶¹ Grimes’s colleague, Charles Sumner, said that his Massachusetts constituents would rather “see their State sink below the sea & become a sandbank before they would adopt those propositions.”¹⁶² One of

¹⁵⁸ Albert D. Kirwan, John J. Crittenden: The Struggle for the Union (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1962), 375-76; Potter, Lincoln and His Party, 101-11.

¹⁵⁹ Evansville, Indiana, Daily Journal, 12 February 1861. Crittenden’s proposals long enjoyed undeserved esteem among historians. Harold M. Hyman, “The Narrow Escape from a ‘Compromise of 1860’: Secession and the Constitution,” in Harold M. Hyman and Leonard W. Levy, eds., Freedom and Reform: Essays in Honor of Henry Steele Commager (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 158-59.

¹⁶⁰ Grimes to Samuel J. Kirkwood, Washington, 28 January 1861, Annals of Iowa, 3rd series, vol. 22 (1940): 567-68.

¹⁶¹ Robert E. May, The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 1854-1861 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 3-189; Robert E. May, Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), passim.

¹⁶² Charles Sumner to John A. Andrew, Washington, 3 February 1861, Andrew Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

those constituents, Henry Adams, opined that Crittenden “does not seem to suppose that the North has any honor” and suggested that Republicans with a modicum of self-respect could well view the Kentuckian’s compromise proposal as “an insult.”¹⁶³ Other constituents of Sumner called the Crittenden compromise a “scheme of abominations” to which “no true Republican can accede” and which “would result in accepting all of Mexico and Central America as Slave States.”¹⁶⁴ Alexander K. McClure predicted to a fellow Republican that the “Crittenden proposition would demoralize us utterly Even the Border States seem determined to humiliate the Republican forces. They come with proffers of peace but with the condition annexed that we must incorporate into the Constitution a political platform against which four-fifths of the people voted in November last; and they all come with secession as their alternative if we fail to accede.”¹⁶⁵ Another Pennsylvanian observed that the Crittenden plan “is a virtual declaration of a purpose to filibuster for the acquisition of more territory, with the direct design of extending slavery. The Republicans will under no circumstances agree to this exaction, come what may.”¹⁶⁶ It was “outrageous to foist on the country demands never made during the late election,” said Maryland Congressman Henry Winter Davis.¹⁶⁷

Some Moderates were conciliators rather than appeasers, favoring several less drastic measures than extending the Missouri Compromise line: repeal of Personal

¹⁶³ Washington correspondence, 7 January, Boston Daily Advertiser, 11 January 1861.

¹⁶⁴ James A. Dix to N. P. Banks, Boston, 15 February 1861, and George S. Boutwell to Banks, Washington, 22 February 1861, Banks Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁶⁵ A. K. McClure to Edward McPherson, Harrisburg, 27 February [1861], Edward McPherson Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁶⁶ Washington correspondence by “Independent” (James E. Harvey), 26 December, Philadelphia North American and United States Gazette, 27 December 1860.

¹⁶⁷ Henry Winter Davis to Samuel Francis du Pont, [Washington], 19 January 1861, transcript, S. F. Du Pont Papers, Hagley Museum, Wilmington, Delaware

Liberty Laws; compensation to slave owners for runaways; tougher enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act; a constitutional convention to deal with the crisis; patrols along the border between Free and Slave States to discourage runaways; admittance of the territories to the Union immediately; a ban on acquisition of more land; and guarantees of both the security of slavery where it already existed and the preservation the internal slave trade.

Lincoln, like most of his Northern constituents-to-be, sympathized with the hard-liners rather than the appeasers or the conciliators.¹⁶⁸ Though accommodating by nature, he stubbornly refused to be bullied. Truculent Southerners and timid Northerners could not make him submit to what he considered unreasonable demands. According to a journalist who interviewed him on November 13, Lincoln believed that his election “is only a public pretext for what has long been preparing;” that Southern hotheads had been plotting secession for years and were looking for a convenient excuse to carry out their plans; “that his position on all questions of public concern – all which affect the Slavery question nearly or remotely – is so well known that no declaration of his would change treasonable purposes already announced, and that a reiteration of views which are patent to all men who have sought to know them, would be an evidence of timidity which he does not feel, and of which he would have no man suspect him.”¹⁶⁹ He shared the opinion of a Kentucky friend who told him that the “Hotspurs of the South will no doubt try a while to kick up a dust, but sober second thoughts may calm them down into a decent

¹⁶⁸ Lincoln’s mail contained scores of letters urging him to resist Southern demands that Republicans abandon the Chicago platform. Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. So too did the correspondence of Lyman Trumbull and Elihu B. Washburne. Horace White, The Life of Lyman Trumbull (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), 117-19; Mary Scrugham, The Peaceable Americans of 1860-1861: A Study in Public Opinion (New York: Columbia University, 1921), 64-66n.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Lincoln, Springfield correspondence, 14 November, New York Evening Post, 19 November 1860.

acquiescence to the choice of the Nation.”¹⁷⁰ To make possible that sober second thought, those Hotspurs must be firmly resisted.

The day before the election, Lincoln rejected the appeal of a prosperous Connecticut businessman and former Whig, Henry S. Sanford, to “reassure men honestly alarmed” about the threat to the Union. “There are no such men,” Lincoln replied bluntly. He had, said he, “thought about it – it is the trick by which the South breaks down every Northern man – I would go to Washington without the support of the men who supported me and were my friends before [the] election. I would be as powerless as a block of buckeye wood.” When Sanford persisted, Lincoln added: “The honest men (you talk of honest men) will look at our platform and what I have said – there they will find everything I could now say of which they would ask me to say. – all I could say would be but repetition. Having told them all these things ten times already would they believe the eleventh declaration[?] Let us be practical – there are many general terms afloat such as ‘conservatism’ – ‘enforcement of the irrepressible conflict at the point of a bayonet’ – ‘hostility to the South &c’ – all of which mean nothing without definition. What then could I say to allay their fears, if they will not define what particular acts or acts they fear from me or my friends?” When Sanford handed him letters from anxious merchants, Lincoln snapped: “[I] recognize them as a sett of liars and knaves.” Sanford then pointed out that Southerners were taking steps to arm themselves. “The North does not fear invasion from the Sl[ave] S[tates] – and we of the North certainly have no desire and never had to invade the South,” Lincoln insisted with some heat. “If I shall begin to yield to these threats – If I begin dallying with them, the men who have elected me, if I shall be

¹⁷⁰ Samuel Haycraft to Lincoln, Elizabeth Town, Kentucky, 9 November 1860, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

elected, would give me up before my inauguration – and the South seeing it, would deliberately kick me out.” His first duty, Lincoln explained, “would be to stand by the men who elected me.”¹⁷¹ Lincoln asked Sanford to draft a paper suggesting what should be said to alleviate Southern anxiety, a request that went unanswered.¹⁷² Sanford left Springfield “convinced that no right of the South will be imperilled” in a Lincoln administration and assured William C. Rives that the Rail-splitter’s speeches contained nothing that the Virginia Unionist “would have objected to in 1856” and that the “nigger question” would be solved without bloodshed.¹⁷³

Other leading Republicans in the Nutmeg State also urged Lincoln to reassure the South of his conservative intentions. Gideon Welles recommended that he issue “a document, in some form, that should appease the discontented and violent portion of our

¹⁷¹ Memorandum by John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 5 November 1860, Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 7-8. A few days later, Sanford assured Lincoln that he was right to remain silent. Sanford to Lincoln, New York, 15 November 1860, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. Many other businessmen were alarmed by the prospect of secession. Potter, Lincoln and His Party, 116-33; Foner, Business and Slavery, 224-317.

¹⁷² To John Hay, Sanford described his interview as “an interesting conference with Mr Lincoln on the eve of the Election, when, just landed from South America, & from the midst of Revolutionary movements there, I was so impressed with the certainty of the impending uprising, that, armed with a letter from my friend Truman Smith, I went to Springfield to urge on the future President the Expediency of a speech or letter for the public the day after his election, which should strengthen the hands of the Union men [in the] South, & give the lie to the Revolutionists, [who were] insisting his feeling & purpose was, to break down & destroy ‘the Institution’ in the Southern States by violating constitutional guarantees & thus help the loyal men resist the rising tide of Rebellion. He certainly entertained the idea for a time, but when I came back from St Louis by appointment after the election (the night of it) the excitement was too overwhelming & the cry ‘who’s afraid’ was too strong. And it was better so – the time had come for the problem to be solved violently better than not at all. I have, nevertheless, often regretted I did not, at least, draw up the proposed paper, when, after long discussion, he asked me to do [so] then & there, in the room he was occupying in the State House. When I next met him (as President), he recollected me at once, & his remark ‘well, you see nobody’s hurt yet’ led me to imagine his eyes were not yet opened to the full gravity of the crisis.” Sanford to Hay, Gingelom, Belgium, 23 November 1887, Hay Papers, Brown University.

¹⁷³ Sanford to William C. Rives, n.p., n.d., draft, Sanford Papers, Sanford, Florida, quoted in Joseph A. Fry, Henry S. Sanford: Diplomacy and Business in Nineteenth-century America (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1982), 31.

countrymen, who have been defeated.”¹⁷⁴ When Lincoln’s former colleague in the U.S. House, Truman Smith, made a similar plea, the president-elect gently but firmly declined, stressing that he must maintain his self-respect and succumb to no demands that he placate unreasonable Southerners: “It is with the most profound appreciation of your motive, and highest respect for your judgment too, that I feel constrained, for the present, at least, to make no declaration for the public. I could say nothing which I have not already said, and which is in print, and open for the inspection of all. To press a repetition of this upon those who have listened, is useless; to press it upon those who have refused to listen, and still refuse, would be wanting in self-respect, and would have an appearance of sycophancy and timidity, which would excite the contempt of good men, and encourage bad ones to clamor the more loudly. I am not insensible to any commercial or financial depression that may exist; but nothing is to be gained by fawning around the ‘respectable scoundrels’ who got it up. Let them go to work and repair the mischief of their own making; and then perhaps they will be less greedy to do the like again.”¹⁷⁵

To an interviewer, Lincoln once again emphasized his desire to maintain his self-respect while confronting bullies: “I know the justness of my intentions and the utter groundlessness of the pretended fears of the men who are filling the country with their clamor. If I go into the Presidency, they will find me as I am on record – nothing less,

¹⁷⁴ Welles to Lincoln, Hartford, 10 December 1860, Welles Papers, Library of Congress, in Harold Holzer, Lincoln, President-Elect: Abraham Lincoln and the Great Secession Winter, 1860-1861 (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008), 209.

¹⁷⁵ Truman Smith to Lincoln, New York, 7 November 1860, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Lincoln to Smith, Springfield, 10 November 1860, Roy P. Basler et al., eds., Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln (8 vols. plus index; New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55), 4:138. The “scoundrels” Lincoln referred to may well have been the signers of an October circular urging New York voters to shun Lincoln, a copy of which Smith had included in his letter of November 7. Those signers were Joshua J. Henry, Jehiel Read, Charles O’Connor, Samuel F. Butterworth, Henry Grinnell, S. L. M. Barlow, Wilson G. Hunt, Samuel J. Tilden, Peter B. Sweeney, Daniel F. Tieman, James Munroe, Darseel Devlin, Andrew Mount and Charles A. Secor.

nothing more. My declarations have been made to the world without reservation. They have been often repeated; and now, self-respect demands of me and the party that has elected me that when threatened I should be silent.”¹⁷⁶

Other Illinois Republicans shared Lincoln’s view of the situation. State Senator Thomas Marshall of Coles County told his fellow legislators: “I cherish this Union as dearly as any man in this chamber,” but, he insisted, “there is something dearer than even the Union – there is something dearer even than peace – it is manhood – it is principle.”¹⁷⁷ Marshall’s senatorial colleague, Richard J. Oglesby, said in that same debate: “I will not lay down my manhood or my cherished principles, and crouch to save the Union.”¹⁷⁸

On November 16, Lincoln explained to visitors that “[m]y own impression is, at present, (leaving myself room to modify the opinion, if upon a further investigation I should see fit to do so), that this government possesses both the authority and the power to maintain its own integrity;” but, he added, that was “not the ugly point of this matter. The ugly point is the necessity of keeping the government together by force, as ours should be a government of fraternity.”¹⁷⁹ When Judge Daniel Breck of Kentucky, a distant relative of Mrs. Lincoln, urged him to appoint Conservatives to office and shun “obnoxious men” like Seward and Cassius M. Clay, Lincoln challenged him to identify any speech in which Seward “had ever spoken menacingly of the South.” He also “said

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Lincoln, Springfield correspondence, 14 November, New York Evening Post, 19 November 1860.

¹⁷⁷ Thomas Marshall, speech in the Illinois Senate, 1 February, Illinois State Register (Springfield), 5 February 1861.

¹⁷⁸ Mark A. Plummer, Lincoln’s Rail-Splitter: Governor Richard J. Oglesby (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001),^{2*}

¹⁷⁹ John G. Nicolay, memorandum, 15 November 1860, Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 10.

that so far as he knew not one single prominent public Republican had justly made himself obnoxious to the South by anything they had said or done, and that they had only become so because the Southern politicians had so persistently bespotted and bespattered every northern man by their misrepresentations to rob them of what strength they might otherwise have[.]” Lincoln told Breck that the Kentuckian was in effect suggesting “that the Republicans should now again surrender the Government into the hands of the men they had just conquered.”¹⁸⁰ Rhetorically he asked: “Does any man think that I will take to my bosom an enemy?” Breck concluded that the president-elect “was rather ultra in the Republican faith.”¹⁸¹

That same day, in a sharply worded letter to a Democratic editor, Lincoln criticized Southern distortions of his views: “Please pardon me for suggesting that if the papers, like yours, which heretofore have persistently garbled, and misrepresented what I have said, will now fully and fairly place it before their readers, there can be no further misunderstanding. I beg you to believe me sincere when I declare I do not say this in a spirit of complaint or resentment; but that I urge it as the true cure for any real uneasiness in the country that my course may be other than conservative. The Republican newspapers now, and for some time past, are and have been republishing copious extracts from my many published speeches, which would at once reach the whole public if your class of papers would also publish them. I am not at liberty to shift my ground – that is out of the question. If I thought a repetition would do any good I would make it. But my judgment is it would do positive harm. The secessionists, per se believing they had

¹⁸⁰ John G. Nicolay, memorandum, 16 November 1860, Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 10-11.

¹⁸¹ George Robertson to John J. Crittenden, Lexington, 16 December 1860, Crittenden Papers, Library of Congress.

alarmed me, would clamor all the louder.”¹⁸² In December, Lincoln gave Thurlow Weed his views on secession: “my opinion is that no state can, in any way lawfully, get out of the Union, without the consent of the others; and that it is the duty of the President, and other government functionaries to run the machine as it is.”¹⁸³

During the month after his triumph at the polls, Lincoln fended off other appeals to placate the South by pointing out that he would not be officially elected until December 5.¹⁸⁴ “My time not having arrived,” he told a visitor in mid-November, “I am content to receive all possible light on the subject, and glad to be out of the ring.”¹⁸⁵ He was following the policy of “masterly inactivity” recommended by several advisors and Republican editors.¹⁸⁶ Because “Mr. Lincoln is nothing beyond a private American citizen at this time,” the Ohio State Journal argued in mid-November, it would be manifestly inappropriate for him to issue unofficial proclamations.¹⁸⁷ Joseph Medill spoke for many Republicans when he insisted that Lincoln’s letter of acceptance and published speeches, along with the party’s platform, were sufficient. “There are a class of d[amne]d fools or knaves who want him to make a ‘union saving speech’ – in other

¹⁸² Lincoln to N. P. Paschall, Springfield 16 November 1860, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:140. On those misrepresentations, see Potter, Lincoln and His Party, 41-42; Crofts, Reluctant Confederates, 92; Reynolds, Editors Make War, 210-17 and passim.

¹⁸³ Lincoln to Thurlow Weed, Springfield, 17 December 1860, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:154.

¹⁸⁴ Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 16 November, New York Herald, 22 November 1860; Charles Gibson, typescript of an autobiography, pp. 41-42, Gibson Papers, Missouri Historical Society. On December 5, presidential electors would meet in the various states to cast their ballots formally.

¹⁸⁵ Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 19 November, New York Herald, 20 November 1860.

¹⁸⁶ Elihu B. Washburne to Lincoln, Washington, 9 December 1860; L. F. Holbrook to Lincoln, New York, 12 November 1860, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁸⁷ “Manifesto Republicans,” Ohio State Journal (Columbus), 14 November 1860.

words to set down to conciliate the disunionists and fire-eaters. He must keep his feet out of all such wolf traps.”¹⁸⁸

On November 20, during the long-delayed jubilation in Springfield, Lincoln spoke publicly for the first time since the election. His tone was far more conciliatory than the one he had used in dealing with Truman Smith, Henry S. Sanford, and others. A torchlight procession of Wide Awakes led an exultant crowd to his house, where they gave “a striking exhibition of the power and the capabilities of Western lungs.”¹⁸⁹ There, “with great deliberation, emphasis and distinctness,” he said to them: “I thank you, in common with all those who have thought fit, by their votes, to endorse the republican cause. [Applause.] I rejoice with you in the success which has so far attended that cause. [Applause.] Yet in all our rejoicings let us neither express nor cherish any harsh feelings towards any citizen who by his vote has differed with us. [Loud cheering.] Let us at all times remember that all American citizens are brothers of a common country, and should dwell together in the bonds of fraternal feeling. [Immense applause.]”¹⁹⁰

While these vague remarks offered little to reassure the South, Lincoln penned a more explicit statement which Lyman Trumbull incorporated into his speech that same day in Springfield. The president-elect had been urged to have a surrogate like Trumbull deliver such a message; a Tennessee merchant had advised him that secessionists in South Carolina “are sending their emisaries all over the South and the people are made to believe that the Republicans are intending to emancipate the ignorant negroes by force. If

¹⁸⁸ Medill to Ozias M. Hatch, Chicago, 16 November 1860, Hatch Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

¹⁸⁹ Springfield correspondence by Ecarte (John Hay), 20 November, Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 22 November 1860.

¹⁹⁰ Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 20 November, New York Herald, 21 November and 4 December 1860.

some of your friends, (like Trumbull), would make a declaration that you were eminently conservative it could do no harm, but we at the South could use it to combat our political disunion antagonists.”¹⁹¹ Others seconded that suggestion.¹⁹²

Trumbull spoke the following words written by Lincoln: “I have labored in, and for, the Republican organization with entire confidence that whenever it shall be in power, each and all of the States will be left in as complete control of their own affairs respectively, and at as perfect liberty to choose, and employ, their own means of protecting property, and preserving peace and order within their respective limits, as they have ever been under any administration. Those who have voted for Mr. Lincoln, have expected, and still expect this; and they would not have voted for him had they expected otherwise. I regard it as extremely fortunate for the peace of the whole country, that this point, upon which the Republicans have been so long, and so persistently misrepresented, is now to be brought to a practical test, and placed beyond the possibility of doubt. Disunionists per se, are now in hot haste to get out of the Union, precisely because they perceive they can not, much longer, maintain apprehension among the Southern people that their homes, and firesides, and lives, are to be endangered by the action of the Federal Government. With such ‘Now, or never’ is the maxim.” Naively Lincoln added this closing thought: “I am rather glad of this military preparation in the South. It will enable the people the more easily to suppress any uprisings there, which their misrepresentations of purposes may have encouraged.”¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ L. F. Holbrook to Lincoln, New York, 12 November 1860, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. See also Charles B. Dew, Apostles of Disunion: Southern Secession Commissioners and the Causes of the Civil War (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001).

¹⁹² John Olney to Lyman Trumbull, Shawneetown, Illinois, 16 November 1860, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁹³ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:141-42.

Lincoln's authorship of these sentiments was identified in the press.¹⁹⁴ The reaction to this speech confirmed his view that he should remain silent.¹⁹⁵ Though Republican journals praised it, opposition papers did not.¹⁹⁶ To Henry J. Raymond, editor of the New York Times, Lincoln explained: "On the 20th. inst. Senator Trumbull made a short speech which I suppose you have both seen and approved. Has a single newspaper, heretofore against us, urged that speech [upon its readers] with a purpose to quiet public anxiety? Not one, so far as I know. On the contrary the Boston Courier, and its' class, hold me responsible for the speech, and endeavor to inflame the North with the belief that it foreshadows an abandonment of Republican ground by the incoming administration; while the Washington Constitution, and its' class hold the same speech up to the South as an open declaration of war against them. This is just as I expected, and just what would happen with any declaration I could make. These political fiends are not half sick enough yet. 'Party malice' and not 'public good' possesses them entirely. 'They seek a sign, and no sign shall be given them.'"¹⁹⁷

This private expression was echoed by a report in the New York Herald that the South's reaction to Trumbull's speech convinced people in Springfield (presumably including Lincoln) that "disunion has been determined upon, and that it will be accomplished at all hazards." Almost all residents of the Illinois capital "have made up

¹⁹⁴ Springfield correspondence, n.d., Cincinnati Commercial, n.d., copied in the Ohio State Journal (Columbus), 22 November 1860.

¹⁹⁵ Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 3 December, Cincinnati Commercial, 6 December 1860.

¹⁹⁶ "Policy of the President Elect," Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 21 November 1860; New York World, 22 November 1860; Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 22 November 1860; New York Evening Post, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 3 December 1860; Ralph S. Roske, "Lincoln's Peace Puff," Abraham Lincoln Quarterly 6 (1950-51) 243-45.

¹⁹⁷ Lincoln to Raymond, 28 November 1860, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:145-46. The New York Herald said that Trumbull "preaches that terrible alternative of whipping a seceding state back into the Union. Will not such an experiment unite the whole south in arms against the federal government? And what then? The anarchy of Mexico." Quoted in the New York World, 23 November 1860.

their minds to the certainty of the secession of South Carolina, and their apprehensions now centre in the question whether she will be followed by any other of the restive states. The ineffectiveness of Trumbull's effort precludes the probability of another definition of Mr. Lincoln's executive intentions in advance of the inaugural. A repetition of the attempt to pacify the South by mere words, without the additional guarantee of official acts, it is believed would prove equally fruitless, and perhaps be construed into a sign of fear and weakness."¹⁹⁸

Criticizing his silence, Democrats sneered that Lincoln was "nothing but a weak, prejudiced local politician" from "a retired country village in the interior of Illinois," a man of little understanding, "surrounded constantly by venal flatterers and breathing but one atmosphere . . . that created by the extreme and fanatical portion of his party."¹⁹⁹ His unwillingness to make a public declaration may have been a mistake. Such a document might have allayed fears in the Upper South and Border States and predisposed them to remain in the Union when hostilities broke out. But it might also have wrecked the Republican coalition and doomed his administration to failure before it began.

While Lincoln did not issue formal statements before departing Springfield in February, he did make known his views in other ways. He sometimes spoke about the crisis with visitors, who then leaked his remarks to the press. "He receives all with winning affability, converses freely upon political topics, [and] does not hesitate to express his opinions thereon," according to one report.²⁰⁰ But he would often qualify his

¹⁹⁸ Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 1 December, New York Herald, 6 December 1860.

¹⁹⁹ Cincinnati Enquirer, 10 April 1861, 27 December 1860, quoted in John Thomas Hubbell, "The Northern Democracy and the Crisis of Disunion, 1860-1861" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1969), 234, 233.

²⁰⁰ Springfield correspondence, 3 November, New York World, n.d., copied in the Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, 8 November 1860.

remarks by saying that he hoped his callers “would bear in mind that he was not speaking as President, or for the President, but only exercising the privilege of talking which belonged to him, in common with private citizens.” He also possessed “the faculty of checking and turning conversation, when it seems to be taking a direction not likely to suit him, and of barring by his mere manner rising inquiries which ought not to be put.”²⁰¹

But occasionally Lincoln let down his guard. When a visitor speculated that disunionists would seize Washington before his inauguration if they were not appeased, he replied: “I will suffer death before I will consent or will advise my friends to consent to any concession or compromise which looks like buying the privilege of taking possession of this government to which we have a constitutional right; because, whatever I might think of the merit of the various propositions before Congress, I should regard any concession in the face of menace the destruction of the government itself, and a consent on all hands that our system shall be brought down to a level with the existing disorganized state of affairs in Mexico.”²⁰² This strong statement was widely published by Northern newspapers, including the Chicago Press and Tribune and the New York Tribune, which ran it daily below their mastheads. To a Missourian who urged him to support a “backdown declaration,” Lincoln replied “emphatically” that he “would sooner go out into his backyard & hang himself.”²⁰³ On February 8, alluding once again to suicide, he answered an old friend who asked him if he would stand by his 1858

²⁰¹ “Interview with Lincoln,” Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 8 January 1861.

²⁰² Remarks concerning concessions to secessionists, [ca. 19-21 January 1861], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:175-76. This caller was probably Congressman William Kellogg.

²⁰³ Lincoln told this to George Sumner on January 21. George Sumner to John A. Andrew, Springfield, 21 January 1861, Andrew Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

speeches, by the Chicago platform, and by the Constitution: “I will die before I will depart from any of those things under threats made by traitors and secessionists under arms, defying the government. I can go out to my barn and hang myself for the good of my country; but to stultify myself, my party, the people, to buy from the traitors for the people what are the people’s rights and dues, thus demoralizing the government and the Union, I shall never do it – no, never.” The friend to whom he made these remarks noted that Lincoln “has a dominant, ruling will on questions pertaining to the right, the just and the true.”²⁰⁴

Lincoln also used journalists to broadcast his views. From November to February, Henry Villard of the New York Herald and Cincinnati Commercial reported almost daily from Springfield, often describing the opinion of “Springfield” or “the men at the capitol,” which doubtless reflected the president-elect’s thinking. Villard’s dispatches were extensively reprinted. In addition, Lincoln continued his decades-long habit of writing for the Springfield Illinois State Journal, widely regarded as his mouthpiece.²⁰⁵ Major newspapers like the New York Tribune quoted the Journal’s editorials as an indicator of Lincoln’s intentions.²⁰⁶ Lincoln occasionally granted formal interviews in

²⁰⁴ Lincoln purportedly told this to an old friend of more than twenty years’ standing. Springfield correspondence by “Illinois,” 8 February, Boston Atlas and Bee, 13 February 1861. “Illinois” sounds like Herndon.

²⁰⁵ “A Worthy Foeman,” Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 24 January 1861. After December 12, when the paper ran Lincoln’s queries about appointing Southerners to the cabinet, it was assumed that the Journal was the president-elect’s organ. Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 17 December, New York Herald, 21 December 1860; Missouri Republican (St. Louis), n.d., copied in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 16 November 1860. In mid-February, however, the Journal editors said: “we solemnly affirm that he has not dictated a line that has appeared in this paper since his election, touching political affairs. He is not responsible for what we say, but when we assert anything positively respecting him or his intentions we know whereof we affirm.” Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 13 February 1861.

²⁰⁶ See, for example, New York Tribune, 23 February 1861.

which he discussed public affairs.²⁰⁷ His assistant personal secretary, John Hay, wrote anonymous dispatches for the Missouri Democrat reporting Lincoln's views and intentions.²⁰⁸

As he followed events in the South, Lincoln conscientiously searched for precedents to guide him in shaping his response. According to Villard, he “is at all times surrounded by piles of standard works, to which constant reference is made. His strong desire for full and reliable information on all current topics renders it especially regretful to him, that circumstances debar him from obtaining anything but ex parte statements as to the progress of events in the South.”²⁰⁹ His imperfect sources of information about South Carolina cheered him up shortly before the state's secession convention met on December 17. Lincoln told a visitor he thought that “things have reached their worst point in the South, and they are likely to mend in the future. If it be true, as reported, that the South Carolinians do not intend to resist the collection of the revenue, after they ordain secession, there need be no collision with the federal government. The Union may still be maintained. The greatest inconvenience will arise from the want of federal courts; as with the present feeling, judges, marshals, and other officers could not be obtained.” With moderation and good humor, he added that the charges the South made against the North “were so indefinite that they could not be regarded as sound. If they were well-defined, they could be fairly and successfully met. But they are so vague, that they cannot be long maintained by reasoning men even in the Southern States.” He expressed some

²⁰⁷ Chicago correspondence, 14 December, Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, 17 December 1860; Springfield correspondence, 14 November 1860, 28 January 1861, New York Evening Post, 19 November 1860, 1 February 1861. The last-cited dispatch was by Richard J. McCormick.

²⁰⁸ Burlingame, ed., Lincoln's Journalist, xi-xxiii, 17-52.

²⁰⁹ Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 7 December, New York Herald, 15 December 1860.

irritation with the New York Tribune and other newspapers which recommended that the erring sisters be allowed to depart in peace; such advice, said he, “was having a bad effect in some of the border States, especially in Missouri, where there was danger that it might alienate some of the best friends of the cause.” There and in “some other States, where Republicanism has just begun to grow, and where there is still a strong pro-slavery party to contend with, there can be no advantage in taunting and bantering the South.”

Republican leaders in such areas “had urged him to use his influence with the journals referred to, and induce them to desist from their present tone towards the South.” His caller reported that Lincoln “did not say he had promised to do this, and I only gathered from his manner and language that he would prefer to see the bantering tone abandoned.” He had formed his opinion of the situation in the South, he cautioned, “after much study and thought; they were his views at the present time but were of course liable to be modified by his more mature judgment, after further information and further study of the progress of events.”²¹⁰

On December 20, South Carolina officially seceded. When the news reached Springfield, it “made an immense sensation among all classes and political creeds” with the notable exception of Lincoln, who “did not experience any extraordinary shock of nerves” but rather quipped that “he would henceforth look for ‘foreign inland news’ in his dailies.” The “attempted legalization of open rebellion” failed to “make him any more willing to listen to compromise.” Henry Villard concluded that “[t]imidity is evidently no

²¹⁰ Chicago correspondence by G. P., 14 December, Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, 17 December 1860. On the Radicals’ avowed willingness to let the South secede, see David M. Potter, “Horace Greeley and Peaceable Secession,” Journal of Southern History 7 (1941): 145-59; Potter, Lincoln and His Party, 51-57; Sowle, “The Conciliatory Republicans,” 135-42; Stamp, And the War Came, 22-25.

element of his moral composition.”²¹¹ That day the Illinois State Journal ran a bellicose editorial which was thought to reflect Lincoln’s views.²¹² South Carolina, it declared, “cannot get out of this Union until she conquers the Government. The revenues must be collected at her ports, and any resistance on her part will lead to war.” A violation of the laws would compel the president to act. “The laws of the United States must be executed – the President has no discretionary power on the subject – his duty is emphatically pronounced in the Constitution. Mr. Lincoln will perform that duty. Disunion, by armed force, is TREASON, and treason must and will be put down at all hazards.” Secessionists should understand that “the Republican party, that the great North, aided by hundreds of thousands of patriotic men in the slave States, have determined to preserve the Union – peaceably if they can, forcibly if they must.”²¹³ The Journal ran equally strong editorials in the following weeks.²¹⁴ (It is no wonder that Herman Kreismann thought Lincoln “has the notion of playing General Jackson” or that Henry Villard reported that “there are dormant qualities in ‘Old Abe’ which occasion will draw forth, develop and remind people to a certain degree of the characteristics of ‘Old Hickory.’”)²¹⁵

²¹¹ Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 20 December, New York Herald, 25 December 1860, and Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 20 December, Cincinnati Commercial, 26 December 1860.

²¹² Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 20 December, New York Herald, 21, 25 December 1860.

²¹³ Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 20 December 1860.

²¹⁴ See, for example, “The Republican Party Stands by the Constitution,” (December 25), “Seizure of Fort Moultrie,” (December 29), “The Reason Why They Go,” (December 31), “Senator Johnson’s Speech,” (December 31), “Why Don’t Mr. Lincoln Speak Out and Calm the South?” (January 3), “No Surrender of Principle” (January 4), “Conciliation and Compromise,” (January 5), “The Constitution as it Is” (January 11), “Mr. Douglas’ Position” (January 12), “Incipient Treason” (January 13), “The Democratic Party Divided!” (January 17), “Secession and Its Fruits” (January 21), “The Position of the Republicans” (January 26), “The Position of the Republican Party” (January 28), “We Want Concession” (February 1), “The Coercion of States” (February 5), “The Hour of Trial” (February 6), “Mr. Kellogg’s Proposed Amendments to the Constitution,” (February 7), “The Compromise Question” and “There is Principle at Stake” (February 8), “Our Flag is There!” (February 9).

²¹⁵ Herman Kreismann to Edward Lillie Pierce, Washington, 11 January 1861, E. L. Pierce Papers, Harvard University; Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 7 December, New York Herald, 15 December 1860.

This should have come as no surprise, for the Journal had been publishing similar editorials for over a month and quoting the anti-secession speeches that Lincoln had delivered in Kansas a year earlier, including his statement that “if constitutionally we elect a President, and therefore you undertake to destroy the Union, it will be our duty to deal with you as old John Brown was dealt with. We can only do our duty.”²¹⁶ One of the most prescient and hard-hitting editorials appeared on December 18, arguing that the Cotton States girded for war because “they know that the friends of Union and this Government will not yield up everything to an insolent, treasonable slave power without a struggle.” Once the secessionists have defied the law, “the work of death will begin” and the North will be united by the South’s rule-or-ruin stance. “We do not like to contemplate the results of civil war, but if the secessionists are determined to bring it about, it may be well enough to look it in the face.” The first result would be “the total overthrow of slavery.” Fugitive slaves from the Border States, which probably would not secede, will escape in droves to the North. Slaves in the Gulf States would rise up against their masters. “Who will say that an African Garibaldi may not even now be awaiting, with plan and arms prepared, the approaching hour? Burning dwellings – outraged, murdered wives and children, is a horrible, heart-rending picture. Yet to it we would direct the gaze of the madmen who are leading the Cotton States into rebellion against the best Government the world has ever witnessed.” Through secession, Southerners would achieve nothing “but war and all the evils resulting from it.” They “cannot gain peace nor security – they cannot gain territory – they cannot recover fugitives – they cannot blow out the moral lights that guide the Northern mind, and repress all sympathy for struggling

²¹⁶ Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 26, 29 November; 7, 11, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20 December 1860; 13 January 1861.

bondsmen.” Europe will not aid the secessionists. Territories will not be opened to them. The Fugitive Slave Act will not be enforced. “The North may lose much in life and property, but she will preserve the Government, and win the applause and admiration of the world.”²¹⁷

Events in Georgia strengthened Lincoln’s hope that South Carolina’s example would not be imitated. The disunionist governor of the Peach State, Joseph E. Brown, met stiff resistance from prominent leaders like Alexander H. Stephens, Herschel V. Johnson, and Benjamin H. Hill.²¹⁸ Lincoln read Stephens’s November 14 pro-Union speech before the Georgia legislature “with great satisfaction.” In Springfield it “formed the subject of protracted conversation.” Villard noted that “beneficial results are expected from the restraining influence of the distinguished Georgian.”²¹⁹ Stephens, who had been a friend and ally of Lincoln during his term in the House over a decade earlier, argued that since the Democrats would control Congress, Lincoln could do little harm; that his mere election was no justification for rash action; and that secession should not be undertaken unless the federal government committed an aggressive act. Lincoln commented that “Mr. Stephens is a great man – he’s a man that can get up a blaze whenever he’s a mind to – his speech has got up a great blaze in Georgia – I never could get up a blaze more than once or twice in my life.”²²⁰ Privately, Stephens expressed

²¹⁷ Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 18 December 1860.

²¹⁸ See Unionist utterances by Stephens, Johnson, and Hill in William W. Freehling and Craig M. Simpson, eds., Secession Debated: Georgia’s Showdown in 1860 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 51-114.

²¹⁹ Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 29, 30 November, New York Herald, 1, 4 December 1860.

²²⁰ Linton Stephens to Alexander H. Stephens, Sparta, Georgia, 8 February 1861, Alexander H. Stephens Papers, Manhattanville College, Purchase, New York. This account is based on what Lincoln said during his visit to Chicago in November. Linton Stephens heard it from one Dick Johnson, who heard it from a

admiration for Lincoln: “In point of merit as a man I have no doubt Lincoln is just as good, safe and sound a man as Mr. Buchanan, and would administer the Government so far as he is individually concerned just as safely for the South and as honestly and faithfully in every particular. I know the man well. He is not a bad man. He will make as good a President as Fillmore did and better too in my opinion. He has a great deal more practical common sense.”²²¹ On November 30, Lincoln, who asked Stephens for a copy of this speech, was “reported to have said that the best item of news he had received since the 6th of November was that of Mr. Stephens’ election as delegate to the Georgia State Convention.”²²² If that convention were to reject secession, the disunionist movement might collapse elsewhere.

In December, Lincoln asked Stephens: “Do the people of the South really entertain fears that a Republican administration would, directly, or indirectly, interfere with their slaves, or with them, about their slaves? If they do, I wish to assure you, as once a friend, and still, I hope, not an enemy, that there is no cause for such fears. The South would be in no more danger in this respect, than it was in the days of Washington. I suppose, however, this does not meet the case. You think slavery is right and ought to be extended; while we think it is wrong and ought to be restricted. That I suppose is the rub. It certainly is the only substantial difference between us.”²²³

Mrs. Lee, who heard it from her sister Mrs. Craig, who heard Lincoln say these words, or something like them, at a party in the Windy City.

²²¹ Stephens to J. Henly Smith, Crawfordsville, [Georgia], 10 July 1860, in Ulrich B. Phillips, ed., The Correspondence of Robert Toombs, Alexander H. Stephens, and Howell Cobb (Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1911; 2 vols.; Washington: n.p., 1913), 2:487.

²²² Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 30 November, New York Herald, 1 December 1860.

²²³ Lincoln to Stephens, Springfield, 22 December 1860, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:160.

Secessionists agreed, for they denounced the doctrines of the Republican party rather than Lincoln himself. “There are no objections to him as a man, or as a citizen of the North,” remarked James Henry Thornwell of the Presbyterian Theological Seminary in South Carolina. “He is probably entitled, in the private relations of life, to all the commendations which his friends have bestowed upon him.”²²⁴ Similarly, a North Carolina Unionist wrote: “It is not Lincoln – so far as he is concerned, he is taken but little in the account. There is but little bitterness of feeling against him individually. So far from it, he is regarded as neither a dangerous or a bad man. We have no fears, that he is going to attempt any great outrage upon us. We rather suppose his purpose will be to conciliate. But it is . . . the fundamental idea, that underlies the whole movement of his nomination, the canvass, & his election. It is the declaration of unceasing warfare against slavery as an institution, as enunciated by the Representative men of the party – the Swards, & Wades, & Wilsons & Chases, & Sumners &c. &c. We Southern people, being warm-hearted, and candid, & impetuous if you please, are also confiding & credulous. When men of high position assert any thing seriously, we believe they are in earnest. And when the men who lead & direct the Republican party tell us, that they do not intend to pause in their work, till they have driven slavery off the American Continent – when Wilson tells us that the election of Lincoln has placed our necks under their heels – & Sumner tells us that Lincoln’s election involves a change in the policy of the government – when we are thus notified beforehand, that we may expect a still more

²²⁴ Thornwell, “The State of the Country” (pamphlet; New Orleans: True Witness and Sentinel Office, 1861), in Jon L. Wakelyn, ed., Southern Pamphlets on Secession, November 1860-April 1861 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 162.

relentless war upon our property – I say when we see this, our people think it is time to have this dispute settled.”²²⁵

In December, the nation turned its eyes toward Washington where Buchanan and Congress would confront the gathering storm. Lincoln felt the “greatest anxiety” as he awaited the president Buchanan’s annual message.²²⁶ The weak, vacillating Old Public Functionary disappointed his successor-to-be and most other Northerners by proclaiming that although secession was unconstitutional, the federal government could do nothing legally to stop it. The lame-duck president denounced the antislavery movement: “The incessant and violent agitation of the slavery question throughout the North for the last quarter of a century has at length produced its malign influence on the slaves and inspired them with vague notions of freedom. Hence a sense of security no longer exists around the family altar. This feeling of peace at home has given place to apprehensions of servile insurrections. . . . Should this apprehension of domestic danger, whether real or imaginary, extend and intensify itself until it shall pervade the masses of the Southern people, then disunion will become inevitable.” The “long-continued and intemperate interference of the Northern people with the question of slavery in the Southern states” was to blame for the crisis.²²⁷

Upon reading a press synopsis of this message, Lincoln “very freely gave vent to his surprise at its tenor, as it plainly revealed, in his opinion, Mr. Buchanan’s desire to rest the whole responsibility of the secession movement on the Free states. He expressed himself likewise in strong language on the part that refers to himself, as he says it entirely

²²⁵ Kenneth Rayner to Caleb Cushing, Raleigh, 9 December 1860, Cushing Papers, Library of Congress.

²²⁶ Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 4 December, New York Herald, 9 December 1860.

²²⁷ A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1907, ed. James D. Richardson (New York: Bureau of National Literature and Art, 1908), 9:626.

misrepresents his views.”²²⁸ (The synopsis indicated falsely that Buchanan said Lincoln’s “antecedents are calculated to excite the fears of South Carolina.”)²²⁹ When a corrected version of Buchanan’s message appeared in the press a few days later, Lincoln calmed down, for the president’s remarks about him did not seem so inaccurate after all. Still, Lincoln was incensed at the ascription of blame for the crisis to the antislavery forces rather than to the Southern fire-eaters.²³⁰ The Illinois State Journal denounced “the weak and delusive argument of Mr. Buchanan and his Attorney-General, that to execute the laws within a State is to ‘coerce a State,’ and that to protect the property of the United States from plunder and preserve the national flag from dishonor, is to ‘make war on a sovereign State.’ We would restore words to their honest use, and have the truth shine out that a State cannot secede, nor by any act of its Legislature or Convention, oust the Government of its jurisdiction; nor change its own relation or the relation of its citizens to the Government one jot or tittle; but if aggrieved must seek the remedy in the manner prescribed by the Constitution for its own amendment.”²³¹

When Buchanan’s message was referred to a special House committee consisting of one member from each of the thirty-three states, Lincoln’s “apprehensions of a split between the ultra and conservative republicans” reportedly grew, for he considered such a body “too large and heterogeneous.”²³² He was right; the committee, which wrangled throughout the winter, failed to reach a consensus. On December 13, its Republican

²²⁸ Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 5 December, New York Herald, 10 December 1860.

²²⁹ Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 5 December 1860.

²³⁰ Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 9 December, New York Herald, 10 December 1860.

²³¹ “The Right of Coercion and Making War on a State,” Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 22 January 1861.

²³² Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 10 December, New York Herald, 15 December 1860.

members divided eight to eight on a motion acknowledging that the South's complaints were justified.²³³ The next day, Congressman William Kellogg (Illinois' representative on the committee), assured his colleagues that Lincoln had no desire to touch slavery where it existed by law; that he supported the repeal of unconstitutional Personal Liberty Laws; and that he favored a just enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act. To the delight of Democrats, Kellogg promised to introduce a measure providing that territories would be admitted to the union with or without slavery in accordance with the wishes of their inhabitants.²³⁴ Along with Committee Chairman Thomas Corwin and Iowa Representative Samuel R. Curtis, Kellogg – but not Lincoln – had become an appeaser willing to abandon the Chicago Platform.²³⁵

Dominating Congress that winter, Seward maneuvered desperately to keep the Union from breaking apart before Lincoln's inauguration. The senator viewed himself as a well-informed realist who must somehow save the nation from fire-eaters in the Deep South and naïve, stiff-back Republicans like Lincoln who failed to understand the gravity of the crisis. He paid lip service to upholding the party's principles while urging his colleagues "to practice reticence and kindness."²³⁶ Meanwhile, behind the scenes, he maneuvered to win concessions that might placate the South even if they violated the

²³³ Potter, Lincoln and His Party, 91-97.

²³⁴ Washington correspondence, 8 December, New York Tribune, 15 December 1860; Hubbell, "Northern Democracy and the Crisis of Disunion," 228.

²³⁵ Sowle, "The Conciliatory Republicans," 125.

²³⁶ Seward to William Schouler, Washington, 13 June 1867, in William Schouler, A History of Massachusetts in the Civil War (2 vols.; Boston: E. P. Dutton, 1868-71), 1:41-42; Seward to his wife, Washington, 7 December 1860, Frederick W. Seward, ed., Seward at Washington as Senator and Secretary of State: A Memoir of His Life, with Selections from His Letters, 1846-1861 (2 vols.; New York: Derby and Miller, 1891), 2:480.

Chicago platform.²³⁷ Privately (but not publicly) he supported the Crittenden Compromise. When James Barbour, a prominent Virginia Unionist, told him “frankly that nothing less than the Crittenden Compromise” would satisfy the Old Dominion, Seward replied: “I am of your opinion that nothing short of that will allay the excitement, and therefore I will favor it substantially.”²³⁸ Seward was delighted to learn that the Committee of Thirty-Three would contain pro-compromise Representatives, including his chief ally in the lower chamber, Charles Francis Adams. On December 18, the senate established a Committee of Thirteen, akin to the House Committee of Thirty-Three, and named Seward a member.

Alarmed by the ferocity of Deep South secessionists, many Republicans joined Seward in favoring conciliation. On December 5, Representative John A. Gilmer reported that “the anxiety here from all quarters (except the Southern fire eaters) to preserve the Union, is intense. In fact the North seems inclined to yield everything to preserve the Union.”²³⁹ Gilmer exaggerated. To be sure, moves to introduce a Force Bill were squelched, but it remained unclear what further gestures the North was willing to make. Northerners appealed for sectional calm in vague terms. A constituent told Congressman John Sherman of Ohio that “the great mass desire the preservation of the Union, if that be possible without too great a sacrifice of principles.”²⁴⁰ How should “too great a sacrifice of principles” be defined? The moderates looked to Lincoln for guidance. Congressman

²³⁷ Sowle, “The Conciliatory Republicans,” 254.

²³⁸ James Barbour to Frederic Bancroft, 24 August 1863, Bancroft, Life of Seward, 2:32n. Other evidence suggests that the Sage of Auburn would have supported Crittenden’s scheme if Lincoln had not opposed it. Potter, Lincoln and His Party, 183-84; Daniel Crofts, “Secession Winter: William Henry Seward and the Decision for War,” New York History 65 (1984): 238.

²³⁹ Gilmer to W. A. Graham, 5 December 1860, in Sowle, “The Conciliatory Republicans,” 52.

²⁴⁰ [J. Beatty?] to Sherman, 23 December 1860, in Sowle, “The Conciliatory Republicans,” 73.

Elbridge G. Spaulding told Weed: “Should he lead off on some reasonable and practicable plan it would have great weight and decide the course of many who are now passive and in doubt as what should be done.”²⁴¹ A Democratic member of the House Committee of Thirty-Three who favored Weed’s proposal to extend the Missouri Compromise line to California (allowing slavery to expand below the latitude of 36° 30’) said: “Lincoln must soar above party ties & party fealty.”²⁴² In mid-December, that committee almost adopted Weed’s scheme, but it failed thanks largely to Lincoln’s behind-the-scenes intervention.²⁴³

To Lincoln, Weed’s plan contained “too great a sacrifice of principles” and therefore he opposed it adamantly. Slavery, he insisted, must not be allowed to expand. Twelve years earlier, he, along with the overwhelming majority of Northern congressmen, had voted against extending the Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific coast.²⁴⁴ In 1859, he had told Republicans: “Never forget that we have before us this whole matter of the right or wrong of slavery in this Union, though the immediate question is as to its spreading out into new Territories and States.”²⁴⁵ The symbolic significance of the issue of slavery in the territories, as well as its practical implications, dominated his thinking in the winter of 1860-61. On December 6, Lincoln wrote to Congressman Kellogg, who had asked him for guidance: “Entertain no proposition for a compromise in regard to the extension of slavery. The instant you do, they have us under

²⁴¹ Spaulding to Weed, Washington, 22 December 1860, Weed Papers, University of Rochester.

²⁴² John S. Phelps to Samuel Treat, Washington, 18 December 1860, Treat Papers, Missouri Historical Society.

²⁴³ The vote, held on December 14, was 17-14. Potter, Lincoln and His Party, 100.

²⁴⁴ That vote took place on 11 August 1848. See above, chapter 8.

²⁴⁵ Speech at Chicago, 1 March 1859, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:369-70.

again; all our labor is lost, and sooner or later must be done over. Douglas is sure to be again trying to bring in his ‘Pop. Sov.’ Have none of it. The tug has to come & better now than later. You know I think the fugitive slave clause of the constitution ought to be enforced – to put it on the mildest form, ought not to be resisted.”²⁴⁶ (He assured a Kentucky Democrat that the Fugitive Slave Act “will be better administered under my Administration than it ever has been under that of my predecessors.”)²⁴⁷ Two days thereafter Lincoln urged Congressman Elihu B. Washburne to “[p]revent, as far as possible, any of our friends from demoralizing themselves, and our cause, by entertaining propositions for compromise of any sort, on ‘slavery extention.’ There is no possible compromise upon it, but which puts us under again, and leaves all our work to do over again. Whether it be a Mo. line, or Eli Thayer's Pop. Sov. it is all the same. Let either be done, & immediately filibustering and extending slavery recommences. On that point hold firm, as with a chain of steel.”²⁴⁸ On December 10, he wrote Trumbull in the same vein: “Let there be no compromise on the question of extending slavery. If there be, all our labor is lost, and, ere long, must be done again. The dangerous ground – that into which some of our friends have a hankering to run – is Pop. Sov. Have none of it. Stand firm. The tug has to come, & better now, than any time hereafter.”²⁴⁹ A week later, he reiterated to Trumbull his firm stance: “If any of our friends do prove false, and fix up a

²⁴⁶ Kellogg to Lincoln, Washington, 6 December 1860, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Lincoln to Kellogg, Springfield, 11 December 1860, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:150.

²⁴⁷ Reminiscences of A. H. Markland, New York Tribune, 2 August 1885.

²⁴⁸ Lincoln to E. B. Washburn, Springfield, 13 December 1860, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:151.

²⁴⁹ Lincoln to Trumbull, Springfield, 10 December 1860, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:149-50.

compromise on the territorial question, I am for fighting again.”²⁵⁰ The following day he told John D. Defrees of Indiana: “I am sorry any republican inclines to dally with Pop. Sov. of any sort. It acknowledges that slavery has equal rights with liberty, and surrenders all we have contended for. Once fastened on us as a settled policy, filibustering for all South of us, and making slave states of it, follows in spite of us, with an early Supreme court decision, holding our free-state constitutions to be unconstitutional.”²⁵¹ When Pennsylvania Governor-elect Andrew G. Curtin asked his advice about what to say in his inaugural address, Lincoln counseled that he should make clear “without passion, threat, or appearance of boasting, but nevertheless, with firmness, the purpose of yourself, and your State to maintain the Union at all hazzards.”²⁵² (Acting on this advice, Curtin told auditors at his January 15 inauguration: “No part of the people, no state, nor combination of states, can voluntarily secede from the Union, nor absolve themselves from their obligations to it. To permit a state to withdraw at pleasure from the Union, without the consent of the rest, is to confess that our government is a failure.”)²⁵³

Newspaper reports suggesting that Lincoln would not be intimidated by the prospect of war echoed his private letters. On December 12, the New York Herald spoke of his hard-line position. Intimate friends, evidently reflecting his views, said “that peaceable secession was a matter of absolute impossibility.” They asserted “that even though coercion were not employed by the federal government, a conflict would be made

²⁵⁰ Lincoln to Lyman Trumbull, Springfield, 17 December 1860, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:153.

²⁵¹ Lincoln to John. D. Defrees, Springfield, 18 December 1860, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:155.

²⁵² Lincoln to Curtin, Springfield, 21 December 1860, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:158.

²⁵³ Pennsylvania Archives, ed. George Edward Reed (4th series; Harrisburg: State of Pennsylvania, 1902), 8:372.

inevitable by the improbability of an agreement upon the terms of the separation between the two sections of the country. Secession and civil war were evidently thought contemporaneous contingencies by the parties in question. Reconciliation on the basis of Northern concessions was scouted with much vehemence; although aggression was deprecated, collision was confidently predicted.” At the same time, Lincoln “took no pains to conceal his indignation” at reports that Western merchants were being molested by Southern mobs.²⁵⁴

Editorials in the Illinois State Journal, widely viewed as reflecting Lincoln’s opinion, also rejected appeasement. “We feel indignant, sometimes,” said the Journal on December 17, “when we hear timid Republicans counseling an abandonment, in part, of Republican grounds. We are asking for nothing that is not clearly right. We have done nothing wrong – we have nothing to apologize for – nothing to take back, as a party. We have fought a hard battle – we have come out victorious, and shall we now call back the routed, flying enemy, and basely surrender all that we have gained? Never!”²⁵⁵ (Henry Villard called this editorial proof of Lincoln’s “growing mettle.”)²⁵⁶

No concession would satisfy the South, Lincoln argued: “Give them Personal Liberty bills & they will pull in the slack, hold on & insist on the border state Compromise – give them that, they’ll again pull in the slack & demand Crit[tenden]’s

²⁵⁴ Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 12 December, New York Herald, 17 December 1860. On similar reactions to the mobbing of Northerners in the South after the election, see Perkins, ed., Northern Editorials, 1:508-38, especially 513-16 (“Southern Atrocities upon Northern Men,” Chicago Tribune, 13 December 1860.)

²⁵⁵ Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 17 December 1860.

²⁵⁶ Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 17 December, New York Herald, 21 December 1860.

Compr[omise] – that pulled in, they will want all that So[uth] Carolina asks.”²⁵⁷ (When asked if he would back the repeal of state personal liberty laws, he confessed that he had never read one, adding that “if they were what they were represented to be by Southern men, they certainly ought to be repealed.”)²⁵⁸ Lincoln’s pessimism was well founded, for it is not clear that any compromise was possible.²⁵⁹ A New York Republican observed that “Lincoln was right . . . when he said in his Cooper Institute speech that the only thing that will satisfy them at all is for us to think as they do about slavery and act accordingly. This we cannot do – if we pretended to do it they would give us not credit for sincerity & would be right in not doing it. If any less is offered it only subjects [us] to the disgrace of failure.”²⁶⁰ A Representative from Maine concurred, predicting that nothing “short of legalizing and introducing slavery in the North would satisfy” the Cotton States.²⁶¹ On December 13, before serious efforts to avert civil war were undertaken in Washington, thirty Southern members of Congress stated that “argument is exhausted. All hope of relief in the Union through the agency of committees, Congressional legislation, or constitutional amendments, is extinguished We are satisfied that the honor, safety, and independence of the Southern people are to be found only in a Southern

²⁵⁷ Lincoln told this to George Sumner on January 21. George Sumner to John A. Andrew, Springfield, 21 January 1861, Andrew Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

²⁵⁸ Dispatch by “R. S. H.,” n.p., n.d., Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 18 January 1861.

²⁵⁹ Patsy S. Ledbetter, “John J. Crittenden and the Compromise Debacle,” Filson Club History Quarterly 51 (1977): 125-26, 141-42; Abrahamson, The Men of Secession and Civil War, 129-30, 169-71; Hyman, “Narrow Escape from a ‘Compromise of 1860,’” 158-59; Hans L. Trefousse, Benjamin Franklin Wade: Radical Republican from Ohio (New York: Twayne, 1963), 144.

²⁶⁰ E. Peshine Smith to Henry C. Carey, Rochester, 16 December 1860, Henry C. Carey Papers in the Edward Carey Gardiner Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

²⁶¹ Justin S. Morrill to his wife, Washington, 7 December 1860, Morrill Papers, Library of Congress.

Confederacy.”²⁶² That same day, Alabama Congressman David Clopton wrote to a friend: “The argument is exhausted, further remonstrance is dishonorable, hesitation is dangerous, delay is submission, ‘to your tents, O Israel!’ and let the God of battles decide the issue.”²⁶³ Republicans like Lincoln maintained that they had won the presidential election fair and square and should not submit to Southern threats. These deeply-held convictions made it unlikely that concessions of any kind would have persuaded the Deep South to return voluntarily.

While privately refusing to support the Crittenden Compromise, Lincoln continued to balk at issuing a public statement. When catechized by North Carolina Congressman John A. Gilmer, a strong Unionist, he replied: “Is it desired that I shall shift the ground upon which I have been elected? I can not do it. You need only to acquaint yourself with that ground, and press it on the attention of the South. It is all in print and easy of access. May I be pardoned if I ask whether even you have ever attempted to procure the reading of the Republican platform, or my speeches, by the Southern people? If not, what reason have I to expect that any additional production of mine would meet a better fate? It would make me appear as if I repented for the crime of having been elected, and was anxious to apologize and beg forgiveness. To so represent me, would be the principal use made of any letter I might now thrust upon the public. My old record cannot be so used; and that is precisely the reason that some new declaration is so much sought.” He assured Gilmer that he had “no thought of recommending the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, nor the slave trade among the slave states.” Even if

²⁶² Edward McPherson, The Political History of the United States During the Great Rebellion (2nd ed.; Washington: Philp and Solomons, 1865), 37.

²⁶³ David Clopton to Clement C. Clay, in Allan Nevins, The War for the Union (4 vols.; New York: Scribner, 1959-1971), 1:68.

he “were to make such recommendation, it is quite clear Congress would not follow it.” He would not employ slaves in arsenals and dockyards nor would he use political litmus tests in appointing officials in areas of the South with few Republicans. In sum, he concluded, “I never have been, am not now, and probably never shall be, in a mood of harassing the people, either North or South. On the territorial question, I am inflexible On that, there is a difference between you and us; and it is the only substantial difference. You think slavery is right and ought to be extended; we think it is wrong and ought to be restricted. For this, neither has any just occasion to be angry with the other.” He claimed that he had never read any of the personal liberty laws but pledged that he would be glad to see their repeal if they violated the Constitution. Yet he “could hardly be justified, as a citizen of Illinois, or as President of the United States, to recommend the repeal of a statute of Vermont, or South Carolina.”²⁶⁴

Lincoln was doubtless correct in thinking that no statement would placate the Deep South. The editors of the Charleston Mercury had announced that even if he were “to come out and declare that he held sacred every right of the South, with respect to African slavery, no one should believe him; and, if he was believed, his professions should not have the least influence on the course of the South.”²⁶⁵

Lincoln’s legendary patience wore thin as disunionists continued to misrepresent him.²⁶⁶ He lamented that the South “has eyes but does not see, and ears but does not

²⁶⁴ Lincoln to John A. Gilmer, Springfield, 15 December 1860, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:151-52. Gilmer’s letter to Lincoln was evidently suggested by Corwin to give Lincoln a chance “to quiet the country & refute Locofocos lying.” Lincoln’s reply was expected to “fall like a clap of thunder.” Henry Winter Davis to Samuel Francis du Pont, [Washington], [no day indicated] December 1860, transcript, S. F. Du Pont Papers, Hagley Museum, Wilmington, Delaware.

²⁶⁵ “Mr. Lincoln’s Forthcoming Proclamation,” Charleston Mercury, 13 October 1860.

²⁶⁶ Washington correspondence by “Independent” (James E. Harvey), 30 January, Philadelphia North American and United States Gazette, 31 January 1860.

hear.”²⁶⁷ William C. Smedes, president of the Southern Railroad Company of Mississippi, claimed that the president-elect “holds the black man to be the equal of the white,” “stigmatizes our whole people as immoral & unchristian,” and made “infamous & unpatriotic avowals . . . on the presentation of a pitcher by some free negroes to Gov: Chase of Ohio.” When Henry J. Raymond forwarded these allegations to him, Lincoln replied heatedly: “What a very mad-man your correspondent, Smedes is. Mr. Lincoln is not pledged to the ultimate extinction of slavery; does not hold the black man to be the equal of the white, unqualifiedly as Mr. S. states it; and never did stigmatize their white people as immoral & unchristian; and Mr. S. can not prove one of his assertions true. Mr. S. seems sensitive on the questions of morals and Christianity. What does he think of a man who makes charges against another which he does not know to be true, and could easily learn to be false? As to the pitcher story, it is a forgery out and out. I never made but one speech in Cincinnati – the last speech in the volume containing the Joint Debates between Senator Douglas and myself. I have never yet seen Gov. Chase. I was never in a meeting of negroes in my life; and never saw a pitcher presented by anybody to anybody.”²⁶⁸

When another Mississippian, E. D. Ray, called on Lincoln, he was told that “if the Southern States concluded upon a contingent secession, that is, upon awaiting aggressive acts on the part of his Administration, they would never go out of the Union.”²⁶⁹ The

²⁶⁷ Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 11 December, New York Herald, 15 December 1860. Villard here quotes Lincoln’s own language.

²⁶⁸ Lincoln to H. J. Raymond, Springfield, 18 December 1860, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:156. Cf. William C. Smedes to John Sherman, Vicksburg, 10 December 1860, John Sherman Papers, Library of Congress; William C. Smedes to Stephen A. Douglas, Vicksburg, 10 December 1860, Douglas Papers, University of Chicago.

²⁶⁹ Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 19 December, New York Herald, 24 December 1860.

president-elect handed Ray a copy of his 1858 debates with Douglas and assured him: “You will find that the only difference between you and me is, that I think slavery wrong, and you think it right; that I am opposed to its extension, while you advocate it; and that as to the security of the institution and the protection of slave property in the States where it has a lawful existence, you will find it as great under my administration as it ever was under that of Mr. Buchanan.” When Lincoln expressed the hope that Southerners were not fearful that he would hurt them, Ray replied: “No we ain’t.”²⁷⁰ Yet another caller from the Magnolia State came away from an interview with the president-elect admitting that “the idea of ‘raw head and bloody bones’ – the beast with ‘seven heads and ten horns’ at once passed from his mind.” He wished all his people could see Lincoln, for the “mere sight of him would drive secession out of the heart of every honest Southerner.”²⁷¹ Similarly, a “burly Virginian” declared after an interview: “Lincoln is a fine man; he will never intentionally harm any one.”²⁷² To an Illinois Democrat born in the Old Dominion, Lincoln expressed “cordial sentiments toward the people of Virginia.”²⁷³ When a South Carolina woman exclaimed to him, “you look, act, and speak like a humane, kind and benevolent man!” he asked in reply: “Did you take me for a savage, madam?”²⁷⁴

²⁷⁰ Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 20 December, Cincinnati Commercial, 24 December 1860.

²⁷¹ “Causes of Secession,” Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 25 January 1861.

²⁷² Springfield correspondence [by Richard J. McCormick], 28 January, New York Evening Post, 1 February 1861.

²⁷³ Herring Chrisman to William C. Rives, Springfield, 7 February 1861, Rives Papers, Library of Congress. Chrisman, who spoke with Lincoln both at a hotel and at the president-elect’s home, lived in Galesburg and took a special interest in the Illinois commissioners to the Washington Peace Conference. Chrisman to Rives, Galesburg, 4 February 1861, ibid.

²⁷⁴ Isaac N. Arnold, The History of Abraham Lincoln and the Overthrow of Slavery (Chicago: Clarke, 1866), 184.

Back in Washington, Seward, aware that his original strategy was not working, decided to take the offensive. Fertile in expedients, he dispatched Weed to Springfield to lobby the president-elect on behalf of the Crittenden Compromise, which the senator was willing to support if Lincoln would do so.²⁷⁵ Perhaps Lincoln could yet be persuaded to back Crittenden's solution to the sectional crisis.

Lord Thurlow pressured Lincoln to support Crittenden's plan, which the Albany Evening Journal was touting. That paper had just reiterated its call for the extension of the Missouri Compromise line and declared that it was "almost prepared to say, that Territories may be safely left to take care of themselves; and that, when they contain a Population which . . . entitles them to a Representative in Congress, they may come into the Union with State Governments of their own framing."²⁷⁶ In Albany it was believed that this editorial reflected Seward's views, for as the Sage of Auburn once remarked: "Seward is Weed and Weed is Seward. What I do, Weed approves. What he says, I endorse. We are one."²⁷⁷ Seward made no attempt to dissociate himself from Weed's editorial, which the president-elect termed "a heavy broadside" and told its author: "You have opened your fire at a critical moment, aiming at friends and foes alike. It will do

²⁷⁵ Seward to Lincoln, Albany, 16 December 1860, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Kirwan, Crittenden, 379-80; Charles Francis Adams diary, 27 December 1860, Adams Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society; Major L. Wilson, "The Repressible Conflict: Seward's Concept of Progress and the Free-Soil Movement," Journal of Southern History 37 (1971): 553. Lincoln had Leonard Swett and David Davis invite Weed in his name to visit Springfield. Swett and Davis to Weed, Bloomington, Illinois, 10 December 1860, Abraham Lincoln Collection, Beinecke Library, Yale University; Swett to Weed, Bloomington, 26 November 1860, Weed Papers, University of Rochester; Swett to the editor, Chicago, 13 July, Chicago Tribune, 14 July 1878.

²⁷⁶ "'No More Compromises' – 'No Backing Down,'" Albany Evening Journal, 17 December 1860.

²⁷⁷ Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, 18 December 1860; Welles, Lincoln and Seward, 23. The comment about Seward and Weed being one was made by Seward in the presence of Welles, Chase, and Montgomery Blair. Gideon Welles to Montgomery Blair, Hartford, 30 April 1873, Blair Family Papers, Library of Congress. Major L. Wilson argued that "there are grounds for believing that Seward was prepared in late December 1860 to support the Crittenden plan." Wilson, "The Repressible Conflict." 553.

some good or much mischief. Will the Republicans in New York sustain you in this view of the question?" Weed said he would press his case even if it remained unpopular.

Lincoln optimistically replied "that while there were some loud threats and much muttering in the cotton States, he hoped that by wisdom and forbearance the danger of serious trouble might be averted, as such dangers had been in former times."²⁷⁸ He strenuously rejected the proposal to restore the Missouri Compromise line, then gave Weed the following resolutions to pass along to Seward for submission to Congress:

"That the fugitive slave clause of the Constitution ought to be enforced by a law of Congress, with efficient provisions for that object, not obliging private persons to assist in it's execution, but punishing all who resist it, and with the usual safeguards to liberty, securing free men against being surrendered as slaves –

"That all state laws, if there be such, really, or apparently, in conflict with such law of Congress, ought to be repealed; and no opposition to the execution of such law of Congress ought to be made –

"That the Federal Union must be preserved."

Lincoln felt that these resolutions "would do much good, if introduced and unanimously supported by our friends."²⁷⁹ Weed was to show them to Hamlin and Trumbull and, if they approved, to have them introduced in Congress.²⁸⁰

In late December, another visitor to Springfield urged Lincoln to endorse the Crittenden Compromise. Duff Green, a prominent Democrat who had served in Jackson's

²⁷⁸ Weed, Autobiography, 603-5; Lincoln to Lyman Trumbull, Springfield, 21 December 1860, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 158-59.

²⁷⁹ Springfield correspondence, 20 December, New York World, 21 December 1860; Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 20 December, New York Herald, 21 December 1860; Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:158.

²⁸⁰ Hamlin to Trumbull, Hampden, Maine, 27 December 1860, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

kitchen cabinet and whose wife was distantly related to Mary Todd Lincoln, traveled to Illinois to persuade the president-elect to lobby Congress on behalf of the Kentucky senator's plan, which was languishing without his support. Green first spoke with President Buchanan, who suggested that he enlist Lincoln's aid.²⁸¹ On December 28, Green and Lincoln conversed at length; the president-elect said of the Crittenden resolutions "that he believed that the adoption of the [Missouri Compromise] line proposed would quiet for the present the agitation of the Slavery question, but believed it would be renewed by the seizure and attempted annexation of Mexico. – He said that the real question at issue between the North & the South, was Slavery 'propagandism' and that upon that issue the republican party was opposed to the South and that he was with his own party; that he had been elected by that party and intended to sustain his party in good faith, but added that the question of the Amendments to the Constitution and the questions submitted by Mr. Crittenden, belonged to the people & States in legislatures or Conventions & that he would be inclined not only to acquiesce, but give full force and effect to their will thus expressed." Green proposed that Lincoln write him a letter referring the measure to the attention of the states.²⁸² Lincoln did prepare such a document, in which he bluntly declared: "I do not desire any amendment of the Constitution. Recognizing, however, that questions of such amendment rightfully belong to the American People, I should not feel justified, nor inclined, to withhold from them, if I could, a fair opportunity of expressing their will thereon, through either of the modes prescribed in the instrument. In addition I declare that the maintainance inviolate of the

²⁸¹ Duff Green, Facts and Suggestions, Biographical, Historical, Financial, and Political (New York: C. S. Westcott, 1866), 225-26.

²⁸² Green to Buchanan, Springfield, 28 December 1860, Buchanan Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. See also "Interview with Lincoln," Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 8 January 1861.

rights of the States, and especially the right of each state to order and control its own domestic institutions according to its own judgment exclusively, is essential to that balance of powers on which the perfection, and endurance of our political fabric depends – and I denounce the lawless invasion, by armed force, of the soil of any State or Territory, no matter under what pretext, as the gravest of crimes. I am greatly averse to writing anything for the public at this time; and I consent to the publication of this, only upon the condition that six of the twelve United States Senators for the States of Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida, and Texas shall sign their names to what is written on this sheet below my name, and allow the whole to be published together.”²⁸³ Instead of giving this document to Green, Lincoln sent it to Trumbull with instructions to pass it on to Green only if it seemed likely to do no harm.²⁸⁴ Trumbull evidently decided not to forward it.²⁸⁵

Others, including Edward Bates and James van Alen, also urged Lincoln to back the Crittenden Compromise.²⁸⁶ In an address that he penned sometime before February 12 but did not deliver, Lincoln explained why he rejected that advice: “I have been greatly urged, by many patriotic men, to lend the influence of my position to some compromise, by which I was, to some extent, to shift the ground upon which I had been elected. This I steadily refused. I so refused, not from any party wantonness, nor from any indifference to the troubles of the country. I thought such refusal was demanded by the view that if, when a Chief Magistrate is constitutionally elected, he cannot be

²⁸³ Lincoln to Duff Green, Springfield, 28 December 1860, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:162-63.

²⁸⁴ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:163.

²⁸⁵ David E. Woodard, “Abraham Lincoln, Duff Green, and the Mysterious Trumbull Letter,” Civil War History 42 (1996): 211-19.

²⁸⁶ Charles Gibson, typescript of an autobiography, pp. 41-42, Gibson Papers, Missouri Historical Society.

inaugurated till he betrays those who elected him, by breaking his pledges, and surrendering to those who tried and failed to defeat him at the polls, this government and all popular government is already at an end. Demands for such surrender, once recognized, are without limit, as to nature, extent and repetition. They break the only bond of faith between public and public servant; and they distinctly set the minority over the majority. I presume there is not a man in America, (and there ought not to be one) who opposed my election, who would, for a moment, tolerate his own candidate in such surrender, had he been successful in the election. In such case they would all see, that such surrender would not be merely the ruin of a man, or a party; but, as a precedent, would be the ruin of the government itself. I do not deny the possibility that the people may err in an election; but if they do, the true cure is in the next election; and not in the treachery of the party elected.”

In that same document, Lincoln explained his refusal to issue a public statement about the crisis: “During the present winter it has been greatly pressed upon me by many patriotic citizens . . . that I could in my position, by a word, restore peace to the country. But what word? I have many words already before the public; and my position was given me on the faith of those words. Is the desired word to be confirmatory of these; or must it be contradictory to them? If the former, it is useless repe[ti]tion; if the latter, it is dishonorable and treacherous. Again, it is urged as if the word must be spoken before the fourth of March. Why? Is the speaking the word a ‘sine qua non’ to the inauguration? Is there a Bell-man, a Breckinridge-man, or a Douglas man, who would tolerate his own candidate to make such terms, had he been elected? Who amongst you would not die by the proposition, that your candidate, being elected, should be inaugurated, solely on the

conditions of the constitution, and laws, or not at all.” Lincoln denied that his silence was “a matter of mere personal honor.”²⁸⁷

In January, Crittenden attempted to have the senate approve his plan even without the endorsement of the Committee of Thirteen, which turned it down on December 22. He tacked on two constitutional amendments suggested by Stephen A. Douglas: that free blacks in the states and territories be denied the right to vote or hold office and that free blacks be colonized to Africa or South America at federal expense. (Why the Little Giant made those proposals is unclear, for Southerners did not want them. It suggests that the racist demagoguery he had long resorted to may have reflected his true personal feelings. It is noteworthy that in supporting the Crittenden Compromise, Douglas abandoned popular sovereignty, an indication that his devotion to principle was shallow.) Crittenden moved that this altered version of his plan be submitted to a national plebiscite.²⁸⁸ When Pennsylvania Congressman James T. Hale suggested a compromise like Crittenden’s revised proposal, Lincoln patiently explained to him why he opposed the extension of the Missouri Compromise line: “We have just carried an election on principles fairly stated to the people. Now we are told in advance, the government shall be broken up, unless we surrender to those we have beaten, before we take the offices. In this they are either attempting to play upon us, or they are in dead earnest. Either way, if we surrender, it is the end of us, and of the government. They will repeat the experiment upon us ad libitum. A year will not pass, till we shall have to take Cuba as a condition upon which they will

²⁸⁷ These passages come from a document in Lincoln’s hand, evidently a speech to be delivered to Kentuckians on his journey to Washington in February 1861. Basler, ed. Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:200-1.

²⁸⁸ Kirwan, Crittenden, 392-96; Robert W. Johannsen, Stephen A. Douglas (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 817-22.

stay in the Union. They now have the Constitution, under which we have lived over seventy years, and acts of Congress of their own framing, with no prospect of their being changed; and they can never have a more shallow pretext for breaking up the government, or extorting a compromise, than now. There is, in my judgment, but one compromise which would really settle the slavery question, and that would be a prohibition against acquiring any more territory.”²⁸⁹

Many Republicans shared Lincoln’s belief that slaveholders fully intended to have the country expand southwards and that Northern Democrats supported their project. W. J. Gregg of Illinois predicted that if the Crittenden Compromise were adopted, “the democracy in company with the disunionists will commence their filibustering for the acquisition of Cuba, Mexico, South America etc.”²⁹⁰ Throughout the 1850s, Douglas had been calling for the annexation of Cuba, and in 1854 the Ostend Manifesto – which warned Spain that if she did not sell that island to the U.S., Americans had every right to seize it – made clear that he was not alone. The Democratic party supported the acquisition of Cuba and an aggressive Caribbean foreign policy.²⁹¹ “We shall have an empire sufficiently large for our purposes and for empire during the next hundred years,” predicted the Charleston Mercury. “In the meantime, we shall colonize Texas throughout, and Chihuahua [Mexico] and a few more good Southern States. We shall have all the Gulf country when once we have shaken ourselves free of the Puritans.” A Georgia editor scouted the argument that the Confederacy’s expansion southward could be thwarted by

²⁸⁹ Crofts, Reluctant Confederates, 232-34; Lincoln to James T. Hale, Springfield, 11 January 1861, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:172.

²⁹⁰ W. J. Gregg to Lyman Trumbull, Paris, Illinois, 6 February 1861, Lyman Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁹¹ Potter, Impending Crisis, 179-95; Johannsen, Douglas, 147, 326, 528-29, 683, 692.

Indians, Spaniards, blacks, or Creoles, “for the dominant race will supplant all others, and slavery will expand South to Brazil, and from there till stopped by snow. It may be an evil, but like cholera, no power can check it but frost.”²⁹² Lincoln’s argument was no mere straw man but a genuine belief that to accept the Crittenden Compromise would strengthen the expansionists’ hand with potentially dire consequences for the cause of freedom.²⁹³

Lincoln’s emphatic opposition to the Crittenden Compromise was partly responsible for its defeat in the Committee of Thirteen on December 22 and in the senate on January 16.²⁹⁴ On the day of the first vote, Charles Francis Adams observed that the “declarations coming almost openly from Mr Lincoln have had the effect of perfectly consolidating the Republicans.”²⁹⁵ Senator Henry Wilson reported that some congressional Republicans “are weak; most of them are firm. Lincoln’s firmness helps our weak ones.”²⁹⁶

It was one of Lincoln’s most fateful decisions, for the Kentucky senator’s scheme, though fraught with many practical problems and silent on the constitutionality of secession and the right of a legally-elected president to govern, represented the best hope of placating the Upper South and thus of possibly averting war, though it was a forlorn

²⁹² Charleston Mercury and the Augusta Constitutionalist, quoted in Barney, Secessionist Impulse, 202.

²⁹³ May, Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 216-23 and passim.

²⁹⁴ Clinton Everett Knox, “The Possibilities of Compromise in the Senate Committee of Thirteen and the Responsibility for Failure,” Journal of Negro History 17 (1932): 437-65; James Ford Rhodes, History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850 (9 vols.; New York: Harper, 1900-28), 3:158-66; Potter, Lincoln and His Party, 181-86.

²⁹⁵ Charles Francis Adams diary, 22 December 1861, Adams Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

²⁹⁶ Henry Wilson to William S. Robinson, Washington, 16 December 1860, in William S. Robinson, “Warrington” Pen-Portraits: A Collection of Personal and Political Reminiscences (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1877), 93.

hope at best, given Southern intransigence.²⁹⁷ The House Committee of Thirty-Three might have approved Crittenden's plan, which the Conditional Unionists of the Upper South regarded as the bare minimum for remaining in the Union, if the Democrats had not insisted that slavery be protected south of the 36° 30' line in all future acquisitions as well as in territory already belonging to the U.S.²⁹⁸ Though senate Republicans rejected the compromise, it still could have passed the upper house on January 16 if three of the six Southern senators in attendance had voted for it instead of abstaining; similarly, on December 22 if two abstaining Democratic senators on the Committee of Thirteen had voted for the compromise, it would have received the endorsement of that body. In light of these facts, Duff Green's allegation that the Civil War was the result of Lincoln's refusal to back the Crittenden Compromise hardly seems warranted.

Stiff-backed Republicans cheered Lincoln's course. Carl Schurz told his wife that the president-elect "stands firm as an oak" and that "his determination is imparted to the timorous members of the party."²⁹⁹ After a visiting Springfield in early January, Indiana Congressman George W. Julian reported that he was "quite captivated" by Lincoln. "He is right," Julian told a friend. "His backbone is pronounced good by the best judges."³⁰⁰ Julian's father-in-law, the old antislavery warhorse Joshua Giddings, came away from an

²⁹⁷ Ledbetter, "Crittenden and the Compromise Debacle," 125-42; Fehrenbacher, Dred Scott Case, 547-49; Potter, Impending Crisis, 553-54; Stamp, And the War Came, 166; May, Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 223-32; Dean A. Arnold, "The Ultimatum of Virginia Unionists: 'Security for Slavery or Disunion,'" Journal of Negro History 48 (1963): 115-29; Nevins, Emergence of Lincoln, 2:392; Crofts, Reluctant Confederates, 197.

²⁹⁸ Sowle, "The Conciliatory Republicans," 216.

²⁹⁹ Schurz to his wife, Boston, 24, 27 December 1860, Joseph Schaefer, ed., Intimate Letters of Carl Schurz (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1928), 236, 237.

³⁰⁰ Julian to S. S. Boyd, n.p., n.d. [January 1861], Julian Papers, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis; Patrick Riddleberger, George Washington Julian, Radical Republican: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Politics and Reform (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1966), 138; Julian, Political Recollections, 1840 to 1872 (Chicago: Jansen, McClurg & Company, 1884), 181-83.

interview with the president-elect convinced that “he intends doing right and will act according to the dictates of his conscience” and “in the most perfect good faith endeavor to carry out the doctrines of the Republican platform.”³⁰¹ After speaking with Lincoln, Missouri Congressman Frank Blair said that the president-elect was “as firm as the rock of ages” and predicted that he “will live up to the principles on which he was elected.”³⁰² The leading senate Radical, Charles Sumner, was optimistic about defeating compromise proposals because “Lincoln stands firm. I know it.”³⁰³ Sumner’s ally and future biographer, Edward L. Pierce, rejoiced “to learn that Lincoln is stiffening the backs of our men.”³⁰⁴

Not every Radical agreed. Charles Henry Ray, who called Lincoln “patriotic and honest,” nonetheless thought that “more iron would do him no harm.”³⁰⁵

Lincoln could not be aware that his rejection of the Crittenden plan would necessarily help pave the road to war.³⁰⁶ He believed that if he were conciliatory on all matters other than slavery expansion and secession, the Upper South and the Border States would remain in the Union and that the Deep South, after a sober second thought,

³⁰¹ Giddings to George W. Julian, Jefferson, Ohio, 14 December 1860, Giddings-Julian Papers, Library of Congress; Giddings to Gerrit Smith, Jefferson, Ohio, 29 December 1860, Smith Papers, Syracuse University.

³⁰² Frank Blair to Montgomery Blair, St. Louis, 14 February 1861, Blair Family Papers, Library of Congress.

³⁰³ Sumner to Joseph R. Hawley, Washington, 31 January 1861, Hawley Papers, Library of Congress. Lincoln had not written to Sumner, but Herndon had sent him a hard-line letter urging opposition to any compromise with slavery. Herndon to Sumner, Springfield, 10 December 1860, Sumner Papers, Harvard University. Moreover, Sumner’s brother George had visited Lincoln in January and came away certain that he would not compromise on slavery expansion.

³⁰⁴ Edward L. Pierce to Sumner, Boston, 31 December 1860, Sumner Papers, Harvard University.

³⁰⁵ Ray to John A. Andrew, Springfield, 17 January 1861, Andrew Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

³⁰⁶ Potter, Lincoln and His Party, 217-24; Potter, “Why the Republicans Rejected Both Compromise and Secession,” Knoles, ed., Crisis of the Union, 99.

might return to the fold. In retrospect, that seems like wishful thinking, but it was not unreasonable, given the size of the Bell and Douglas vote in the South and other indications that disunionism enjoyed only limited popularity there.³⁰⁷ On April 6, John Pendleton Kennedy observed that “there is great reason to doubt, if the people of Louisiana, or Texas or Georgia are actually in favor of the secession.” Moreover, he noted, Unionism prevailed in northern Alabama, Arkansas, and the Border States. The South Carolina secession ordinance had not been submitted to the voters for ratification; the same held true for five of the six other Cotton States – Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas – which followed suit that winter. (Texas was the sole exception.)³⁰⁸ In February, the voters of Virginia, North Carolina, Arkansas, and Tennessee decisively rejected secession.³⁰⁹ In Kentucky, Delaware, Maryland, and Missouri, disunion efforts also fizzled.³¹⁰ Even in the Deep South, Unionism was hardly

³⁰⁷ Potter, Lincoln and His Party, 208-217. For a contrary view, see Gabor S. Boritt, “Abraham Lincoln and the Question of Individual Responsibility,” in Boritt, ed., Why the Civil War Came (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 5-30. Boritt maintains that Lincoln’s action was influenced by the psychological defense mechanism of avoidance.

³⁰⁸ John Pendleton Kennedy to Charles [Ward?, Baltimore], 6 April 1861, letterpress copy, Kennedy Papers, Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore.

³⁰⁹ On February 4, Virginia voters elected 152 delegates to a convention to consider secession; 122 opposed disunion and 30 favored it. By a margin of 103,236 to 46,386, the voters also supported a requirement that any secession ordinance must be submitted to the people for ratification. Five days later, Tennesseans cast 88,803 votes for Unionist candidates to their convention and only 24,749 for secessionists. Simultaneously, by a margin of 69,691 to 57,798, they decided against holding a convention. Jonathan M. Atkins, Parties, Politics, and the Sectional Conflict in Tennessee, 1832-1861 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 241. Similarly, on February 28, North Carolina voters elected a large majority of Unionist delegates and by a narrow margin (47,705 to 46,711) chose not to call such a convention. On February 18, voters in Arkansas cast 23,626 votes for Unionist delegates to a convention and 17,927 for secessionists. Crofts, Reluctant Confederates, 130-63; Potter, Lincoln and His Party, 311-13; Ralph A. Wooster, The Secession Conventions of the South (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 156-57; Jonathan M. Atkins, Parties, Politics, and the Sectional Conflict in Tennessee, 1832-1861 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 241; James M. Woods, Rebellion and Realignment: Arkansas's Road to Secession (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1987), 130.

³¹⁰ Wooster, Secession Conventions of the South, 207-51. In the Kentucky state legislature, a motion to hold a secession convention was tabled by a 54-36 margin. On February 18, Missouri voters cast approximately 110,000 ballots for Unionists and about 30,000 for secessionists. In the subsequent convention, Unionists outnumbered southern-rights candidates 70 to 23. In Maryland, where no convention

extinct. In January, Georgia's immediate secessionists barely won a majority of the votes cast; in the subsequent convention, they carried a crucial motion by the narrow margin of 166 to 130.³¹¹ In Louisiana and Alabama, disunionist candidates did not win by landslides.³¹² In fact, fair plebiscites in those three states may well have revealed that immediate secessionists were in the minority.³¹³ Lincoln said that it "was probably true" that the Louisiana secession ordinance "was adopted against the will of a majority of the people."³¹⁴ (It should be borne in mind, however, that the "cooperationists" were not necessarily Unionists but moderate rather than radical secessionists.)³¹⁵ It was widely believed that many secessionists had no intention of leaving the Union permanently but simply wanted to strengthen their bargaining position in negotiations with the North, hoping to extort concessions through a temporary withdrawal.³¹⁶

If Lincoln overestimated the depth and extent of Southern Unionism, secessionists underestimated Northern resolve to resist their scheme. Misleading them were conservative newspapers like the Detroit Free Press, which that winter warned the

was held and no test vote was taken in the legislature, the governor opposed secession. In Delaware, the lower house of the legislature unanimously condemned secessionism; the upper house followed suit by a vote of 5-3.

³¹¹ Johnson, Secession of Georgia, 63, 116. The somewhat ambiguous results can be variously interpreted. By one calculation the immediate secessionists won 51% of the vote (44,152 to 41,632). Another interpretation of the results has them losing to their cooperationist opponents 42,744 to 41,717.

³¹² Potter, Impending Crisis, 493-97. On January 7, Louisiana voters cast 20,338 ballots for immediate secessionist candidates and 17,296 for their cooperationist opponents. The resulting convention contained 80 immediate secessions delegates and 50 cooperationists. In Alabama, immediate secessionists won 54 seats in the convention and their opponents won 46. Voters in northern Alabama, where few slaves lived, were far less enthusiastic than those in the southern half of the state. Barney, Secessionist Impulse, 267-85; Wooster, Secession Conventions of the South, 52, 104, 106.

³¹³ Nevins, War for the Union, 1:12.

³¹⁴ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:344.

³¹⁵ Cooper, "The Politics of Slavery Affirmed," 209-10. On the difficulty in interpreting the secession votes in the South, see Mering, "Slave-State Constitutional Unionists," 407.

³¹⁶ Potter, Lincoln and His Party, 227-48; Washington correspondence by "Independent" (James E. Harvey), 21 January, Philadelphia North American and United States Gazette, 22 January 1861.

Republicans that “if the refusal to repeal the personal liberty laws shall be persisted in, and if there shall not be a change in the present seeming purpose to yield to no accommodation of national difficulties, and if troops shall be raised in the North to march against the people of the South, a fire in the rear will be opened on such troops which will either stop their march altogether or wonderfully accelerate it.”³¹⁷ Ohio Congressman Clement L. Vallandigham declared that he would shoulder arms to fend off an attack on his state but not to invade the South. After hostilities began, the New Orleans Bee acknowledged that such reassurances “completely deceived” thousands of Southerners. “There is no doubt whatever,” said the editors, “that an opinion prevailed among us that if Lincoln should attempt to make war upon the South, the conservative element in the North would overwhelm his administration, and by timely diversions would extend aid and succor to us.”³¹⁸

Lincoln may have anticipated that war would follow the rejection of the Crittenden Compromise, but he might also have reckoned that the Upper South and Border States would assist in putting down Cotton State rebels. An editorial in the Illinois State Journal, perhaps by the president-elect, argued that the Deep South had different economic interests from the other Slave States. Secession “would certainly render the recapture of fugitive slaves utterly impossible when they had once crossed the northern border,” and thus “slave property would at once become a hundred fold more precarious than it is now,” especially in those states close to the Ohio River and the Mason-Dixon line. Moreover, the Upper South and the Border States had reason to fear that the Cotton

³¹⁷ Detroit Free Press, 29 January 1861, quoted in Hubbell, “Northern Democracy and the Crisis of Disunion,” 103.

³¹⁸ New Orleans Bee, n.d., copied in the Cleveland Plain Dealer, 9 May 1861, quoted in Hubbell, “Northern Democracy and the Crisis of Disunion,” 197.

States might reopen the African slave trade, thus drastically reducing the price of their most lucrative export, slaves. “We are of opinion, therefore, that it will be entirely safe for the Free States, who are perfectly united in their attachment to the Union and the Constitution as it is, to abide by that, make no alterations in it, and no compromise of its principles. We also incline to the belief that the great body of the border Slave States are pretty much of the same opinion, and at all events, doubtful whether they would gain anything by tinkering at the Constitution. If the Cotton States are not satisfied with this, as it appears they are not, and persist in their mad schemes of secession – the General Government will of course have to do its duty, and see that the Constitution and laws are faithfully observed in South Carolina as well as in Massachusetts. And if any extra force is needed for this purpose, we think that the border Slave States, whose tranquility and interests are more imperiled than those of any other part of the country, are just as likely to furnish it as any other part of the Union.”³¹⁹

By the same token, many Southerners misjudged Northern economic divisions. The New Orleans Bee pointed out that there “were not wanting among us . . . numbers of shrewd and experienced citizens who calculated largely on the commercial ties and identity of interests between the South and West, and who believed that ultimately Ohio, Indiana, and other States in that quarter would be glad to unite their destinies with those of a Southern Confederacy.”³²⁰ This view was not entirely confined to the South. An Ohio legislator predicted that his state and its neighbors “will never consent that the mouth of the Miss. River shall be held by a foreign power. In case of a rupture between

³¹⁹ “The Border Slave States and the Cotton States,” Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 24 December 1860.

³²⁰ New Orleans Bee, n.d., copied in the Cleveland Plain Dealer, 9 May 1861, quoted in Hubbell, “Northern Democracy and the Crisis of Disunion,” 198.

the Slave and free States All our pecuniary interests will drive us in Ohio with the South. We cannot afford to pay Tariff[s] to keep up eastern manufacturers alone.”³²¹ (Others argued that economic considerations would impel Midwesterners to crush any Southern rebellion. An Illinois Democratic congressman boldly declared that he would prefer “war for five hundred years, rather than the exclusion of the people of the Upper Mississippi from the unshackled navigation of that river to its mouth.”)³²²

Lincoln doubtless shared the widespread, misguided belief that if a war broke out, it would be short and relatively bloodless.³²³

³²¹ George S. Converse to S. S. Cox, Columbus, 9 January 1861, Cox Papers, Brown University.

³²² John A. McClernand to S. S. Cox, Cairo, 4 December 1861, Cox Papers, Brown University.

³²³ See Kenneth M. Stampp, “Comment on [David Potter’s] ‘Why the Republicans Rejected Both Compromise and Secession,’” in George Harmon Knoles, ed., The Crisis of the Union, 1860-1861 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 108-9. Lincoln allegedly expressed regret for having rejected the Crittenden Compromise, but that allegation, based on fourth-hand testimony, is improbable. In September 1861, George R. Babcock of Buffalo told Oran Follett that Theodore Nelson Parmelee, former editor of the Buffalo Commercial Advertiser, told him a few hours earlier that Delos De Wolfe, a banker in Oswego, had heard from Thurlow Weed “that President Lincoln told him (Weed) that the Crittenden Compromise of last Winter would have saved all this trouble and war and bloodshed, & that he should never cease regretting he had not urged his friends to accept it.” Memo dated 10 September 1861, Oran Follett Papers, Cincinnati Historical Society.