

Chapter Twenty-eight

“Would You Prosecute the War with Elder-Stalk Squirts, Charged with Rose Water?”:

The Soft War Turns Hard

(July-September 1862)

In the summer of 1862, public disenchantment with the Administration’s “fatal milk and water policy” intensified.¹ “The stern sentiment of justice and of retribution which swells even to bursting in millions of American hearts today, must be vindicated,” declared a Cincinnati journalist on Independence Day. “The outraged sense and patience of a long suffering nation must be trifled with no longer.”² Illinois Governor Richard Yates warned Lincoln that the “crisis of the war and our national existence is upon us. The time has come for the adoption of more decisive measures. . . . Mild and conciliatory means have been tried in vain.”³ The “people are fast getting into the belief, that as quiet & moderate war measures have accomplished no good, that severe measures are now necessary, & if the rebels will not lay down their arms – that it is the duty of the Gov^t to smite them hip & thigh,” Lincoln’s friend David Davis observed.⁴

¹ James B. Newcomer to Henry S. Lane, Reading, Pennsylvania, 11 July [1862], typed copy, Lane Papers, Indiana University; Mark Grimsley, The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy toward Southern Civilians, 1861-1865 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 67-95; Silvana R. Siddali, From Property to Person: Slavery and the Confiscation Acts, 1861-1862 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 167-91.

² Washington correspondence by Sigma, 4 July, Cincinnati Gazette, 7 July 1862.

³ Yates to Lincoln, Springfield, 11 July 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴ David Davis to W. W. Orme, Lincoln, Illinois, 15 October 1862, Orme Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

Northerners were growing bloodthirsty. Referring to the Confederacy, a leading Unitarian divine reluctantly concluded that the North “shall be compelled to exterminate her 300,000 slaveholders.”⁵ Mahlon D. Ogden, formerly mayor of Chicago and a leading real estate developer there, insisted that in addition to the emancipation and arming of slaves, “extermination of the rebel whites” was necessary. “Shoot, & hang, & burn, & destroy all that we cannot use, leaving nought but desolation behind as our armies advance, is the only way to save the Union.”⁶ In New York, George Templeton Strong complained that “War on rebels as criminals has not yet begun. We have dealt with these traitors as a police officer deals with a little crowd that threatens a breach of the peace. He wheedles and persuades and administers his club-taps mildly and seldom.”⁷ “Treason must be made odious, and traitors must be punished and impoverished. Their great plantations must be seized, and divided into small farms, and sold to honest, industrious men,” intoned Andrew Johnson of Tennessee.⁸

Constituents told Senator John Sherman that the “people feel that the Government has been too tender of the supposed rights of the rebels under the Constitution,” and that it would be better to “save the National territory intact – though all the Seceded States shall be reduced to Territories – nay depopulated – than that the

⁵ Henry W. Bellows to Cyrus Augustus Bartol, Walpole, N. H., 18 August 1862, Bellows Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁶ Mahlon D. Ogden to James R. Doolittle, Chicago, 6 August 1862, typescript, Doolittle Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

⁷ Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas, eds., The Diary of George Templeton Strong, 1835-1875 (4 vols.; New York: Macmillan, 1952), 3:244 (entry for 26 July 1862).

⁸ Remarks by Johnson during an interview with citizens from Indiana, 21 April 1865, Edward McPherson, The Political History of the United States of America During the Period of Reconstruction (Washington: Philp & Solomons, 1871), 47.

‘Confederacy’ shall prove a success!”⁹ Abolitionists believed that the war must become one of “conquest & extermination, not the killing of every man woman & child, but the destruction & decimation of the ruling classes & an entire social reorganization.”¹⁰

Kansans reportedly thought that “Lincoln has pursued the policy of conciliation long enough. He has given it a fair trial.”¹¹ The president agreed. On July 21, he announced: “I have got done throwing grass.” From now on, he “proposed trying stones.”¹² Sarcastically he asked proponents of a conciliatory policy if they intended to prosecute the war “with elder-stalk squirts, charged with rose water?”¹³ Similarly he told a leading New York Democrat: “This government cannot much longer play a game in which it stakes all, and its enemies stake nothing. Those enemies must understand that they cannot experiment for ten years trying to destroy the government, and if they fail still come back into the Union unhurt.”¹⁴ Solicitude for the rights of slaveholders and other Confederate non-combatants as well as for civil liberties in the North had to be modified. In August, he told visitors that within his administration there “was no division of sentiment” regarding “the confiscation of rebel property, and the feeding of the National troops upon the granaries of the enemy.”¹⁵ Lincoln would prove that his well-

⁹ Sherman Blocker to John Sherman, Wadsworth, Ohio, 23 April 1862; Dr. J. H. Jordan to John Sherman, Cincinnati, 1 January 1862, John Sherman Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁰ Edward Lillie Pierce to N. P. Banks, Boston, 15 September 1862, Banks Papers, Library of Congress.

¹¹ George W. Bell to John Sherman, Lawrence, Kansas, 23 July 1862, John Sherman Papers, Library of Congress.

¹² Washington correspondence by Van [D. W. Bartlett], 22 July, Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 24 July 1862; Washington correspondence, 21 July, Cincinnati Gazette, 22 July 1862; Washington correspondence, 22 July, New York Evening Post, 23 July 1862.

¹³ Lincoln to Cuthbert Bullitt, Washington, 28 July 1862, Roy P. Basler et al., eds., Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln (8 vols. plus index; New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55), 5:344-46.

¹⁴ Lincoln to Augustus Belmont, Washington, 31 July 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:350.

¹⁵ New York Times, 6 August 1862.

deserved reputation for tender-heartedness did not prevent him from doing what was necessary to win the war.¹⁶ In September, a well-connected Interior Department employee reported that the administration intended to wage a war “of subjugation and extermination if the North can be coerced and coaxed into it.” The social system of the South “is to be destroyed and replaced by new propositions and ideas.”¹⁷ Lincoln’s principal secretary, John G. Nicolay, wrote an editorial in November (probably at the instigation of his boss) stating that the “people are for the war; for earnest, unrelenting war; for war now and war to the bitter end, until our outraged and insulted flag shall have been everywhere triumphantly vindicated and restored.”¹⁸

In carrying out this new strategy, Lincoln emancipated slaves, further suspended the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus, drafted men into the army, confiscated Confederate civilian property, and appointed what he hoped were more aggressive, capable generals. On August 25, the new general-in-chief, Henry W. Halleck, reported that the “Government seems determined to apply the guillotine to all unsuccessful generals. It seems rather hard to do this where the general is not at fault, but perhaps with us now, as in the French Revolution, some harsh measures are justified.” Westerners complained to Halleck that Horatio G. Wright was allegedly “pursuing ‘too milk and water a policy towards rebels in Kentucky.’” In keeping with the new approach, Halleck sternly lectured Wright: “Domestic traitors, who seek the overthrow of our Government, are not entitled to its protection and should be made to feel its power. . . . Make them

¹⁶ Richard N. Current, The Lincoln Nobody Knows (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1958), 164-86.

¹⁷ T. J. Barnett to S. L. M. Barlow, Friday [25 September 1862], Barlow Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

¹⁸ Washington Chronicle, 12 November 1862, in 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), 91.

suffer in their persons and property for their crimes and the sufferings they have caused to others Let the guilty feel that you have an iron hand; that you know how to apply it when necessary. Don't be influenced by those old political grannies.”¹⁹

In August, the administration's new toughness led a journalist to remark that recently “the Jacksonian qualities of Abraham Lincoln have been more than ever apparent.”²⁰ This cheered the public, which, though discouraged by McClellan's failure, found reassurance in the president's leadership. Shortly after the Seven Days battles, Frederick Law Olmsted told Lincoln that in “the general gloom, there are two points of consolation and hope One, is the trustworthy, patriotic devotion of the solid, industrious, home-keeping people of the country; the other, the love and confidence constantly growing stronger between these people and their president.”²¹ Echoing Olmsted's analysis, the New York correspondent of the London Times informed his readers that “the President is the most popular man in the United States. Without education or marked ability, without the personal advantage of a fine presence or courteous manners, and placed unexpectedly in a position of unparalleled difficulty and danger, he has so conducted himself amid the storm of passion that rages around him as to have won the good opinion of everybody.”²² Also in London, Charles Francis Adams concluded that Lincoln's manifest integrity inspired the confidence essential for victory.²³

¹⁹ John F. Marszalek, Commander of All Lincoln's Armies: A Life of General Henry W. Halleck (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 168; Henry W. Halleck to Horatio Wright, Washington, 18 November 1862, OR, I, 20, 2: 67-68.

²⁰ Washington correspondence, 4 August, New York Herald, 5 August 1862.

²¹ Frederick Law Olmsted to Lincoln, Chesapeake Bay, 6 July 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

²² New York correspondence, n.d., London Times, n.d., copied in the Chicago Tribune 3 July 1862.

²³ Adams to Richard Henry Dana, London, 11 June 1862, Dana Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

That good opinion was held even by political opponents, including an influential Illinois Democrat who said: "it has been a hard struggle for me to come to the support of a Republican Administration. It has been a hard struggle for the Democratic party. We were afraid of Mr Lincoln, but his firm, honest, patriotic course has won our hearts, and now nine out of every ten of us, every where, would vote for him. He has resisted factions, and shown that he can be President himself, and the President of all the people. I have two sons in the war, and am now ready to go myself."²⁴ The New York Commercial rejoiced that the president would now ignore "the promptings of his kindly nature" and that "the sword of justice will be wielded with a vigor and earnestness that will convince the rebels and the world that he is terribly in earnest."²⁵

But in some circles Lincoln's popularity slipped. New Yorkers were saying that although he was "honest and true" and "thoroughly sensible," nevertheless he lacked "the decision and the energy the country wants." The administration, they felt, "does not lead the people," but rather the people had "to keep up a toilsome vis a tergo [i.e., a force acting from behind], and shove the government forward to every vigorous step." Wall Street attorney George Templeton Strong came to share Wendell Phillips's judgment that "great-uncle Abe" was "a first-rate second-rate man."²⁶ Others condescendingly referred to the president as "a Man of only medium capacity" who was "too amiable to be firm, & too conscientious to be as savage, as the crisis requires."²⁷ A judge in Maine warned that the country would perish "unless the President can be made to feel that here is war –

²⁴ Orville H. Browning to Lincoln, Quincy, Illinois, 11 August 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁵ New York Commercial Advertiser, n.d., copied in the Providence Journal, 17 July 1862.

²⁶ Nevins and Thomas, eds., Strong Diary, 3:244-45, 246, 253 (entries for 4, 16 August, 4 September 1862).

²⁷ J. B. Bond to James Watson Webb, New York, 6 August 1862, Webb Papers, Sterling Library, Yale University; Henry W. Bellows to Edward Everett Hale, New York, 5 July 1862, Bellows Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

internecine war – & the only remedy is subjugation – and that too as in the days of old Rome when the word had a meaning terrific & savage.” Let Lincoln “be made to see that the Dantonian maxim – audacity, audacity, & yet more audacity – is all that can save us.”²⁸ A New Yorker reported that Lincoln’s friends were concluding that he had only one desirable quality, “honesty of intention,” which was more than offset by the lack of decisiveness and “firmness of character” required by the times: “He leans on his subordinates to such a degree that they control his actions.”²⁹ More bitterly, a Wisconsin Republican sneered: “A respectable mule could do better than Lincoln – the former could only bray, while the latter only ‘blabs.’”³⁰

The cabinet also drew intense criticism. “We must have a new, distinct, earnest policy, or the country is ruined, & I do not believe such a policy possible with the present Cabinet,” insisted Maine Governor Israel Washburn. “A war cabinet united in policy & purpose, will give us the right Commanders.”³¹ Another resident of the Pine Tree State lamented that Lincoln and the nation “are on the road to destruction from a weak cabinet,” which had “neither the ability nor the comprehensive will to grasp the troubles of the nation, and Congress has failed equally in the great emergencies.”³² William T. Coggeshall, secretary to Ohio governor William Dennison, likened the cabinet to “a

²⁸ John Appleton to W. P. Fessenden, Bangor, Maine, 22 August, 14 December 1862, Fessenden Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland.

²⁹ John C. Henshaw to David Davis, Washington, 28 July 1862, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. Henshaw was especially angry at Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas. Henshaw to Lincoln, Washington, 26 July 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

³⁰ [A. Finch?] to Zachariah Chandler, Milwaukee, 10 September 1862, Chandler Papers, Library of Congress.

³¹ Israel Washburn to W. P. Fessenden, Augusta, Maine, 12 September 1862, Fessenden Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland.

³² Israel D. Andrews to David Davis, Washington, 16 July [1862], David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

collection of powerful chemicals – each positive, sharp, individual – but thrown together, they neutralize each other and the result is an insipid mess.”³³

OVERHAUL: RESTRUCTURING AND RELOCATING THE ARMY

The failure to bag Stonewall Jackson, along with McClellan’s inability to take Richmond, prompted Lincoln to restructure the military command. He asked Ambrose E. Burnside to replace Little Mac at the head of the Army of the Potomac, but that Rhode Island general, according to Lincoln, “said the responsibility was too great, the consequences of defeat too momentous,” and so declined. He did, however, agree to take charge of a corps.³⁴

The president was more successful in his quest to appoint a general-in-chief empowered both to issue commands and give advice as well as to help insulate him from criticism for unpopular decisions.³⁵ The aged, infirm Ethan Allen Hitchcock had quit after a brief stint as military advisor to the president and secretary of war.³⁶ John Pope, fearing with good reason that he could not succeed as commander of the Army of Virginia unless McClellan were forced to cooperate, told Lincoln that “he should assign an officer as General-in-Chief of the Armies, who should have the power to enforce his

³³ Diary of William T. Coggeshall, 26 November 1863, in Freda Postle Koch, Colonel Coggeshall: The Man Who Saved Lincoln (Columbus, Ohio: Poko Press, 1985), 61.

³⁴ Theodore Calvin Pease and James G. Randall, eds., The Diary of Orville Hickman Browning (2 vols.; Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1925-33), 1:589-90 (entry for 29 November 1862); Howard K. Beale and Alan W. Brownson, eds., Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy under Lincoln and Johnson (3 vols.; New York: W.W. Norton, 1960), 1:124 (entry for 12 September 1862); William Marvel, Burnside (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 99-100.

³⁵ Washington correspondence by Agate [Whitelaw Reid], 5 August, Cincinnati Gazette, 8 August 1862.

³⁶ Benjamin P. Thomas and Harold M. Hyman, Stanton: The Life and Times of Lincoln's Secretary of War (New York: Knopf, 1962), 214.

orders.”³⁷ In keeping with that suggestion, Lincoln gave the job to Henry W. Halleck, the brusque, rigid, testy commander of armies in the West, where substantial victories had been won by U. S. Grant and Pope – victories for which their superior, Halleck, received credit. (Old Brains had demanded that he be put in charge of the entire Western Department: “I ask this in return for Donelson and Henry.” On March 11, he received that post.)³⁸

Halleck was indebted to both Pope and Winfield Scott for his promotion. During Lincoln’s brief visit to West Point in late June, he apparently asked Scott for a recommendation and was told that Halleck would be a suitable choice. (The previous year, Scott had preferred Halleck to McClellan as general-in-chief.)³⁹

Acting on Scott and Pope’s suggestion, Lincoln decided to feel Halleck out. He was favorably disposed to name Old Brains, for he admired the general’s Elements of Military Art and Science, realized that he needed a West Pointer to fill that post, and approved of Halleck’s conduct in St. Louis. He reportedly declared “that Halleck has Websterian brains.”⁴⁰ On July 2, he asked the general to make a flying visit to Washington to consult about military matters.⁴¹ That evening, Halleck coyly responded that though he was reluctant to leave his army in Mississippi, nevertheless “being somewhat broken in health and wearied out with long months of labor and care,” he

³⁷ Peter Cozzens and Robert I. Girardi, eds., The Military Memoirs of General John Pope (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 123-24.

³⁸ Halleck to McClellan, 17 February 1862, OR, I, 7:628; William E. Marsh, “Lincoln and Halleck,” Allan Nevins and Irving Stone, eds., Lincoln: A Contemporary Portrait (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1962), 66.

³⁹ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:119, 392 (entries for 10 September 1862, 31 July 1863); Charles Winslow Elliott, Winfield Scott: The Soldier and the Man (New York: Macmillan, 1937), 733, 755.

⁴⁰ Washington correspondence, probably by Moncure Conway, 24 January, Boston Commonwealth, 31 January 1863.

⁴¹ Lincoln to Halleck, Washington, 2 July 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:300.

would find a trip to the capital “exceedingly desirable.”⁴² Meanwhile, in reply to Rhode Island Governor William Sprague’s appeal that Halleck and his troops be summoned to rescue the Army of the Potomac, the president gave Sprague a letter to hand to Old Brains saying Lincoln would be quite glad if the general would visit him.⁴³ “If I were to go to Washington,” Halleck notified the White House, “I could advise but one thing – to place all the forces in North Carolina, Virginia, and Washington under one head and hold that head responsible for the result.”⁴⁴ This evident willingness to take responsibility pleased Lincoln, who grew ever more exasperated by McClellan’s reluctance to do so.

The president decided to appoint Halleck general-in-chief without a personal consultation. On July 11, the day after returning from Harrison’s Landing, he issued an order naming Old Brains to that post.⁴⁵ Lincoln told Charles Sumner that during his visit to the Army of the Potomac: “My mind became perfectly perplexed, and I determined right then and there to appoint a Commander in Chief who should be responsible for our military operations, and I determined further that General Halleck should be the man.”⁴⁶ Three days later Lincoln wired Old Brains: “I am very anxious – almost impatient – to have you here.”⁴⁷ Leaving Grant in charge of the army around Corinth, a Mississippi city which Halleck had captured with little bloodshed, Old Brains repaired to Washington, arriving on July 23.

⁴² Marszelak, Halleck, 126.

⁴³ William Sprague to Lincoln, Washington, 5 July 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁴ Halleck to Lincoln, Corinth, Mississippi, 10 July 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁵ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:312-13.

⁴⁶ Asa Mahan, A Critical History of the Late American War (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1877), 145.

⁴⁷ Lincoln to Halleck, Washington, 14 July 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:323.

Halleck had grave reservations about his new position, whose duties and powers were ill-defined. Though pleased by the honor that his elevation represented, he wanted to avoid getting caught in the bitter dispute between Stanton and McClellan. Moreover, he did not relish dealing with political intrigue or with civilians ignorant of logistics. He also regretted losing the autonomy he had enjoyed as a department commander.⁴⁸ To McClellan he confessed in late July, “I hold my present position contrary to my own wishes I did everything in my power to avoid coming to Washington. But after declining several invitations from the President, I received the order of the 11th instant, which left me no option. I have always had strong personal objections to mingling in the politico-military affairs of Washington. I never liked the place, and I like it still less at the present time. I greatly feared, whatever I might do, I should receive more abuse than thanks.”⁴⁹ McClellan, who had not been consulted in the matter, regarded the appointment of Halleck “as a slap in the face.” Old Brains was a man “whom I know by experience to be my inferior,” Little Mac told his wife.⁵⁰ “Of all the men whom I have encountered in high position, Halleck was the most hopelessly stupid,” McClellan later wrote. “It was more difficult to get an idea through his head than can be conceived by anyone who never made the attempt. I do not think he had a correct military idea from beginning to end.”⁵¹

Lincoln’s choice of Halleck, though understandable, was a blunder. The president seemingly was unaware that in the western theater Old Brains had demonstrated the

⁴⁸ Marszelak, Halleck, 130-132; Stephen E. Ambrose, Halleck: Lincoln’s Chief of Staff (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1962), 61-65.

⁴⁹ Halleck to McClellan, Washington, 30 July 1862, OR, I, 11, 3:343.

⁵⁰ Stephen W. Sears, ed., The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1989), 369, 368.

⁵¹ McClellan’s Own Story: The War for the Union (New York: C. L. Webster, 1887), 137.

selfishness, hyper-caution, reluctance to assume responsibility, deceitfulness, incompetence, and pettiness that would render him an ineffective general-in-chief.⁵²

The appointment of Halleck was viewed as an admission by Lincoln of his own failure to perform the office of general-in-chief adequately. Whitelaw Reid remarked that “it became a more straightforward acceptance of the responsibility that was expected from Mr. Lincoln.” Reid thought it a shrewd move, placating West Pointers who believed civilians should not try to run military affairs. It was also interpreted as a gentle way to replace McClellan without offending his many supporters, who would be pleased to see Stanton’s influence reduced. Radical Republicans, however, were not pleased; they had denounced Halleck’s 1861 order forbidding runaway slaves to enter his lines.⁵³ Lyman Trumbull considered Halleck “a good organizer but a poor fighter, judging from his movements before Corinth.”⁵⁴

John Hay quoted “a Western friend” – probably Lincoln – who remarked that Halleck “is like a singed cat – better than he looks.” (In recommending a candidate for admission to the bar, Lincoln once said: “He’s a good deal smarter than he looks to be.”⁵⁵ He made a similar observation while introducing a supplicant to Stanton: “This woman is a leetle smarter than she lets on to be.”)⁵⁶ The short, stout, carelessly dressed Halleck was

⁵² John Y. Simon, “Lincoln and Halleck,” in Charles M. Hubbard, ed., Lincoln and His Contemporaries (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1999), 69, 77.

⁵³ Washington correspondence by Agate [Whitelaw Reid], 24 July, Cincinnati Gazette, 30 July 1862.

⁵⁴ Trumbull to his wife, Washington, 12 July 1862, Trumbull Family Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁵⁵ Jonathan Birch in Jesse W. Weik, The Real Lincoln: A Portrait, ed. Michael Burlingame (1922; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 134.

⁵⁶ Dennis Hanks, interview with William H. Herndon, Paris, Illinois, 26 March 1888, in Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants: Letters, Interviews, and Statements about Abraham Lincoln (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 654.

indeed unprepossessing.⁵⁷ One observer wrote that he was “greatly disappointed in his appearance. Small and farmer-like he gives a rude shock to one’s preconceived notions of a great soldier.” A journalist described him memorably as resembling an “oleaginous Methodist parson dressed in regimentals.”⁵⁸

But John Hay admired the general’s “great head,” well stocked with “vast stores of learning, which have drifted in from the assiduous reading of a quarter of a century.” Halleck, said Hay, “is a cool, mature man, who understands himself. Let us be glad we have got him.”⁵⁹ Grant called Halleck “a man of gigantic intellect and well studied in the profession of arms,” and Edward Bates told a friend: “We have great hopes of Halleck.”⁶⁰ The Chicago Tribune hopefully described Old Brains as “a closet general who in his library will be able to give celerity and potency to military movements which in the field he would be powerless to direct.”⁶¹ Noah Brooks admired Halleck’s “plodding, patient, impervious character.”⁶²

Others were less sanguine. According to Gideon Welles, Old Brains was “a man of some scholastic attainments, but without soldierly capacity,” a “dull, stolid, inefficient,

⁵⁷ Henry W. Bellows memo, Washington, 18 September 1862, Bellows Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁵⁸ William Thompson Lusk to his mother, Headquarters of Stevens’ Division, 28 July 1862, in William Thompson Lusk, War Letters of William Thompson Lusk, Captain, Assistant Adjutant-General, United States Volunteers 1861-1863 (New York: Privately printed, 1911), 170; an account of Halleck in November 1861, in Orville James Victor, Men of the Time: Being Biographies of Generals Halleck, Pope, Sigel, Corcoran and Others (New York: Beadle, 1862), 20.

⁵⁹ Washington correspondence, 27 July, Missouri Republican (St. Louis), n.d., clipping in scrapbook, Hay Papers, Library of Congress, in Michael Burlingame, ed., Lincoln’s Journalist: John Hay’s Anonymous Writings for the Press, 1860-1864 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 288.

⁶⁰ Grant to E. B. Washburne, 22 July 1862, John Y. Simon, ed., The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant (28 vols. to date; Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967-), 5:226; Bates to Hamilton Gamble, 24 July 1862, in Marszelek, Halleck, 135.

⁶¹ Marszelek, Halleck, 132.

⁶² Washington correspondence, 29 October, Sacramento Daily Union, 26 November 1863, in Michael Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed: Civil War Dispatches of Noah Brooks (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 75.

and incompetent General-in-Chief” who “earnestly and constantly smoked cigars and rubbed his elbows.”⁶³ Though Chase deplored Halleck’s inaction after the victory at Corinth, he nonetheless hoped that the general would “come & act vigorously.” But, he confided to his daughter, “my apprehensions . . . exceed my hopes.”⁶⁴

Halleck’s first assignment in his new role was to help determine what to do with the Army of the Potomac. Should it be left at Harrison’s Landing or removed to unite with Pope’s army on the Rappahannock? Should McClellan be retained in command? Lincoln instructed the new general-in-chief to visit the army and learn Little Mac’s views and wishes. He was also to inform the Young Napoleon that only 20,000 reinforcements could be supplied and that the general must either attack Richmond with those additional forces or withdraw and link up with Pope. In late July, Lincoln told Halleck “that he was satisfied McClellan would not fight” and authorized him to remove Little Mac if he saw fit.⁶⁵ Several days later Halleck confided to his wife that the president and the cabinet “have lost all confidence in him [McClellan] & urge me to remove him from command.”⁶⁶

Lincoln also wanted Halleck to formulate strategic plans and coordinate the movement of all Union armies. When asked what would be done with McClellan’s army, Lincoln replied: “You forget we have general who commands all the armies and make all

⁶³ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:107, 320, 444 (entries for 3 September 1862, 2 June and 26 September 1863).

⁶⁴ John Niven, ed., The Salmon P. Chase Papers (5 vols.; Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1993-98), 3:226-28.

⁶⁵ Halleck memo for Stanton, Washington, 27 July 1862, OR, I, 11, 3:337-338; Pease and Randall, eds., Browning Diary, 1:563 (entry for 25 July 1862).

⁶⁶ Halleck to Elizabeth Hamilton Halleck, Washington, 9 August 1862, Schoff Civil War Collection, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

the plans to suit himself – ask him!”⁶⁷ With some justification Halleck complained that because the president and the cabinet had approved everything he proposed, “it only increases my responsibility, for if any disaster happens they can say we did for you all you asked.”⁶⁸ Lincoln probably counted on the general to take charge of the Army of the Potomac, unite it with Burnside’s troops at Falmouth, and attack Lee while Pope covered Richmond.⁶⁹

When Halleck delivered the presidential ultimatum to McClellan, Little Mac said he could possibly take Richmond with 30,000 more troops but not with only 20,000 more. He soon changed his mind, however, and reluctantly agreed to try with 20,000. A day after Halleck left, the Young Napoleon reversed course yet again: he would need 50,000 more men, not 20,000!

Upon Halleck’s return to Washington, the administration debated whether to remove the Army of the Potomac from the Peninsula. Lincoln opposed doing so, while Chase emphatically urged that such a step was necessary to strengthen the nation’s credit.⁷⁰ General Winfield Scott, a Virginia native, reportedly said “that no army can exist on the James River after August 15. It must advance, retreat, or perish, poisoned by malaria.”⁷¹ As Lincoln wrestled with this momentous question, his old friend Leonard

⁶⁷ Washington correspondence, n.d., Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican, n.d., copied in the Providence Journal, 11 August 1862.

⁶⁸ Halleck to Elizabeth Hamilton Halleck, Washington 9 August 1862, Schoff Civil War Collection, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

⁶⁹ Marsh, “Lincoln and Halleck,” 70.

⁷⁰ John G. Nicolay and John Hay, Abraham Lincoln: A History (10 vols.; New York: Century, 1890), 6:3.

⁷¹ Scott told this to Charles King who repeated it to Samuel B. Ruggles. Nevins and Thomas, eds., Strong Diary, 3:246 (entry for 16 August 1862).

Swett called on him and reported that the president “is in great trouble & care weighs heavily upon him.”⁷²

When McClellan claimed that he had only 80,000 troops while Lee commanded 200,000, it became obvious to Halleck that the Army of the Potomac could not safely remain on the Peninsula but must unite with Pope. (In fact, the Army of Northern Virginia numbered only 75,000.) In retrospect, it seemed a mistake, but at the time – given the alleged disparity between Union and Confederate forces – it appeared necessary. And so on August 3, Old Brains ordered McClellan to withdraw his army to Aquia Creek, where it would be near Pope. Little Mac objected heatedly but to no avail. Halleck was so worried about Pope’s army that he could hardly sleep.⁷³

Lincoln may have erred in approving Halleck’s recommendation, which was backed by Pope, Stanton, and Chase.⁷⁴ During the president’s visit to the army in early July, he had polled the corps commanders about removing the troops from the Peninsula. E. V. Sumner said it could be done, “but I think we give up the cause if we do it.” Similarly, Samuel Heintzelman thought it “would be ruin to the country.”⁷⁵ Fitz John Porter concurred. William B. Franklin believed it advisable to fall back to the Rappahannock, while E. D. Keyes was non-committal, saying only that a transfer could

⁷² Swett to his wife, Washington, [31?] July 1862, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁷³ Halleck to his wife Elizabeth Hamilton Halleck, Washington, 9 August 1862, Schoff Civil War Collection, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

⁷⁴ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:105, 108-9 (entries for 1, 3 September 1862); T. Harry Williams, Lincoln and His Generals (New York: Knopf, 1952), 145-46; Russell F. Weigley, A Great Civil War: A Military and Political History, 1861-1865 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 136.

⁷⁵ Samuel P. Heintzelman journal, entry for 9 July 1862, Heintzelman Papers, Library of Congress.

be accomplished quickly.⁷⁶ McClellan opined that it “would be a delicate & very difficult matter.”⁷⁷ Two years would pass before the Union army would be so close to Richmond again. But if Lee really did have 200,000 men, he could overwhelm Pope then turn and crush McClellan. Military doctrine stipulated that forces be concentrated lest they be conquered piecemeal.⁷⁸ Slowly the Army of the Potomac withdrew from Harrison’s Landing, thus formally concluding the Peninsular Campaign, during which 25,000 Union soldiers and 30,000 Confederates were killed, wounded, or missing. At least 5,000 more succumbed to disease.

When Lee realized that the Army of the Potomac was pulling back, he launched a new campaign, driving north toward Pope’s 45,000-man Army of Virginia. If he could reach it before McClellan did, which seemed distinctly possible, the Confederates might achieve a smashing triumph. Anxiously Lincoln wondered if Little Mac would move fast enough to prevent such a calamity. On August 19, the president told John A. Dahlgren: “Now I am to have a sweat of five or six days. The Confederates will strive to gather on Pope before McClellan can get around, and his first corps is not in the Potomac yet.”⁷⁹ Chase reported that Lincoln was “uneasy about Pope.”⁸⁰ In fact, the first units of the Young Napoleon’s army did not join Pope until August 23, twenty days after the order to

⁷⁶ In August, Keyes told McClellan and Chase that he thought the army should be removed from the Peninsula. Keyes to Chase, Harrison’s Landing, 6 August 1862, Chase Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁷⁷ Memorandum of Interviews between Lincoln and Officers of the Army of the Potomac, 8-9 July 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:309-11.

⁷⁸ Halleck to McClellan, Washington, 6 August 1862, OR, 11, 1:82-84.

⁷⁹ Madeleine Vinton Dahlgren, Memoir of John A. Dahlgren, Rear-Admiral United States Navy (Boston: J. R. Osgood, 1882), 379.

⁸⁰ Niven, ed., Chase Papers, 1:366 (diary entry for 19 August 1862).

do so was issued. During those weeks, Halleck complained to his wife, “I can[']t get Genl McClellan to do what I wish.”⁸¹

KNOCKED INTO LAST YEAR: THE SECOND BATTLE OF BULL RUN

In July, while Pope lingered at the capital awaiting the arrival of Halleck, he committed blunders. Shortly after the retreat of the Army of the Potomac from the gates of Richmond, he issued a boastful address to his men: “I have come to you from the West, where we have always seen the backs of our enemies; from an army whose business it has been to seek the adversary and to beat him when he was found; whose policy has been to attack, and not defense. . . . I hear constantly of ‘taking strong positions, and holding them’; of ‘lines of retreat,’ and of ‘bases of supplies.’ Let us discard such ideas. . . . Let us study the probable lines of retreat of our opponents, and leave our own to take care of themselves.”⁸² This message was widely ridiculed by the public and resented by soldiers in the Army of the Potomac. General Herman Haupt spoke for many when he said “Pope has made a fool of himself in his first paper,” which “is all bombast, stuff and nonsense, and is a virtual declaration of war between him and McClellan, destroying all harmony of action.” Prophetically Haupt speculated: “I should not be surprised if both should be superseded and some one else put over the two.”⁸³

After thus alienating Eastern troops, Pope compounded matters by issuing a series of orders (written by Stanton) dictating that civilians be treated harshly: property would be

⁸¹ Halleck to his Elizabeth Hamilton Halleck, Washington, 9 August 1862, Schoff Civil War Collection, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

⁸² Address of 14 July 1862, OR, I, 12, 3:474.

⁸³ Haupt to his wife, Washington, 17 and 18 July 1862, typed copies, Lewis Haupt Papers, Library of Congress. Leonard Swett told his wife that “Pope lost cast greatly by his bombast in Washington. No two opinions about this.” Swett to Laura Swett, New York, 10 August 1862, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

seized, disloyal residents deported south, violators of loyalty oaths executed, and guerilla attacks punished by reprisals. The hard hand of war would now fall upon non-combatants.⁸⁴ This policy sharply clashed with that adopted by McClellan, who responded coldly to Pope's friendly overtures. For good reason, Pope feared that Little Mac would not readily cooperate with him.⁸⁵ An angry General Lee deemed Pope a "miscreant" who should be "suppressed."⁸⁶

Robert G. Ingersoll denounced Pope, insisting that "[t]o allow troops to be led by such a jackass, is murder." Rhetorically he asked: "When will Mr. Lincoln stop appointing idiots because they come from Ills. or are related to his charming wife?" (The First Lady's cousin, General John Blair Smith Todd was, in Ingersoll's view, "nothing but a 'sutler' in the regular army. Such appointments would disgrace the Devil himself. Lincoln may be honest but when you are fighting smart scoundrels honesty is but worth little, especially when possessed by an idiot.")⁸⁷

As the Army of Northern Virginia closed in on Pope, he withdrew from the Rapidan to the north bank of the Rappahannock, where for several days he parried the Confederates' attempts to cross. On August 9 at Cedar Mountain, Jackson whipped a much smaller force under N. P. Banks, who inflicted severe casualties before withdrawing.⁸⁸ Lincoln praised the Massachusetts politician-general: "I regard Gen. Banks as one of the best men in the army. He makes me no trouble; but, with a large

⁸⁴ Grimsley, Hard Hand of War, 85-92.

⁸⁵ Hyman and Thomas, Stanton, 217-18.

⁸⁶ James M. McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 501.

⁸⁷ Robert G. Ingersoll to his brother John Ingersoll, Corinth, Mississippi, 10 September 1862, Robert G. Ingersoll Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁸⁸ Fred Harvey Harrington, Fighting Politician: Major General N. P. Banks (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1948), 81-84.

force or a small force, he always knows his duty, and does it.”⁸⁹ To Judge Hugh Lennox Bond of Maryland, Lincoln described Banks as “his ablest man.”⁹⁰ Pope and Banks bought enough time for McClellan’s forces to join them, but Little Mac as usual moved at a glacial pace.⁹¹ (A young woman observing a photograph of the general said “any artist could get a good one of him because he was always setting still.”)⁹² Lee boldly divided his 54,000-man force, sending half of it under Jackson on a wide flanking movement around the Union right. This dangerous maneuver indicated how little respect Lee had for McClellan. On August 27, Stonewall’s men astounded Pope by getting into his rear, sacking his supply depot at Manassas Junction, and severing his communications. When news of that calamity reached the capital, there was “great mortification” at the White House, where Lincoln was “much jaded and depressed,” “blue, and cross” and “more alarmed . . . than at any other time since he came to Washington.”⁹³ His anxiety was understandable, for Jackson now stood between Pope and the capital.

Realizing that Lee had divided his forces, Pope sought to defeat Jackson before the rest of the Army of Northern Virginia could join him. But his failure to block Thoroughfare Gap in the Bull Run Mountains allowed James Longstreet’s corps to stream to Jackson’s rescue.

⁸⁹ Washington correspondence, 12 August, New York Tribune, 13 August 1862.

⁹⁰ Henry Winter Davis to Samuel Francis Du Pont, [Baltimore], 20 November 1862, transcript, S. F. Du Pont Papers, Hagley Museum, Wilmington, Delaware.

⁹¹ Sears, McClellan, 244-47.

⁹² Edwin B. [Munger?] to [Israel] Washburn, [Anna?], 11 September 1862, Israel Washburn Papers, Library of Congress.

⁹³ Elihu Washburne to his wife, Washington, 28 August 1862, Washburn Family Papers, Washburn Memorial Library, Norlands, Maine; unidentified correspondent to Sydney Howard Gay, [Washington], 27 August 1862, Gay Papers, Columbia University; Washington correspondence by Van [D. W. Bartlett], 2 September, Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 6 September 1862.

On August 29 and 30, while the Second Battle of Bull Run raged, Lincoln anxiously followed events as described by telegrams from Colonel Herman Haupt, chief of the army's railroad construction and transportation.⁹⁴ The president greatly admired Haupt, who he said "had enough brains for a corps commander, if he could be spared from his railroad work."⁹⁵ According to John Hay, Lincoln was "particularly struck by the businesslike character of his dispatch[es], telling in the fewest words the information most sought for, which contrasted so strongly with the weak whining vague and incorrect dispatches" of McClellan.⁹⁶ The president also appealed to Banks for news.⁹⁷

The president was especially eager to learn if McClellan, who had established headquarters in Alexandria, was hastening to Pope's assistance. Of the Army of the Potomac's 90,000 men, amazingly only 20,000 managed to connect with the Army of Virginia. The 25,000 soldiers in the corps of Franklin and Sumner could easily have reached the battlefield in time to help Pope if McClellan had not delayed their advance from Alexandria. An officer complained that Little Mac was "too dull to ever accomplish anything in War when decisions & speed are the essentials."⁹⁸ When chided by Halleck, McClellan sniffed that the general-in-chief "is not a refined person at all."⁹⁹ In fairness, it should be noted that Halleck's infrequent orders were vague.

⁹⁴ Haupt to Lincoln, Alexandria, 20, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31 August 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁹⁵ Nicolay and Hay, Lincoln, 6:15n.

⁹⁶ Michael Burlingame and John R. Turner Ettliger, eds., Inside Lincoln's White House: The Complete Civil War Diary of John Hay (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997), 38 (entry for 1 September 1862).

⁹⁷ Lincoln to N. P. Banks, telegram, Washington, 30 August 1862, Banks Papers, Library of Congress.

⁹⁸ Hugh Ewing to his father, Thomas Ewing, Camp at Upton's Hill, Virginia, 5 September 1862, Ewing Family Papers, Library of Congress.

⁹⁹ McClellan to his wife, Alexandria, 29 August 1862, Stephen W. Sears, ed., The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1989), 419.

On August 29, Little Mac shocked the president with an extraordinary telegram. “I am clear that one of two courses should be adopted,” the general counseled; “1st To concentrate all our available forces to open communication with Pope – 2nd To leave Pope to get out of his scrape & at once use all our means to make the Capital perfectly safe.”¹⁰⁰ McClellan wrote his wife that “I have a terrible task on my hands now – perfect imbecility to correct. No means to act with, no authority – yet determined if possible to save the country & the Capital. . . . I have just telegraphed very plainly to the Presdt & Halleck what I think ought to be done – I expect merely a contemptuous silence.”¹⁰¹

Contrary to Little Mac’s expectations, Lincoln did reply. Suppressing his anger at the transparent suggestion that Pope be abandoned to his fate without the hearty cooperation of the Army of the Potomac, he told the general: “I think your first alternative . . . is the right one, but I wish not to control. That I now leave to General Halleck, aided by your counsels.” When Lincoln showed Old Brains the telegram from McClellan, the general-in-chief disingenuously maintained that the Young Napoleon had been repeatedly ordered to hurry Franklin’s corps to Pope.

On August 30, in conversation with John Hay, Lincoln “was very outspoken in regard to McClellan’s present conduct. He said it really seemed to him that McC wanted Pope defeated.” As evidence supporting that conclusion, the president cited Little Mac’s message about leaving Pope “to get out of his own scrape.” He also deplored McClellan’s “dreadful cowardice” in recommending that Chain Bridge be blown up. (An order to that effect was countermanded.)¹⁰² Lincoln was furious at the general’s “incomprehensible

¹⁰⁰ McClellan to Lincoln, near Alexandria, 20 August 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁰¹ McClellan to his wife, Alexandria, 29 August 1862, Sears, ed., McClellan Papers, 417.

¹⁰² Sears, McClellan, 252-53.

interference with Franklin's corps which he recalled once, and then when they had been sent ahead by Halleck's order, begged permission to recall them again & only desisted after Halleck[']s sharp injunction to push them ahead till they whipped something or got whipped themselves. The president seemed to think him a little crazy." (Indeed, McClellan displayed unmistakable signs of deep-seated paranoia.)¹⁰³ When Hay asked if the general-in-chief "had any prejudices," Lincoln exclaimed: "No! Halleck is wholly for the service. He does not care who succeeds or who fails so [long as] the service is benefited." In fact, Halleck had misinformed Lincoln about the orders to McClellan. Old Brains was too timid to confront the Young Napoleon.¹⁰⁴ In the midst of the battle, Halleck reportedly "lost the serene, cheerful cordial manner which was his a week ago." He was "very short even with men who bring letters from Lincoln."¹⁰⁵

Later that day, Hay and the president met with Stanton, who "was unqualifiedly severe upon McClellan." The war secretary "said that nothing but foul play could lose us the battle & that it rested with McC. and his friends," who deserved to be court-martialed. Stanton, wrote Hay, "seemed to believe very strongly in Pope. So did the President." On the night of August 30, according to Hay, "Every thing seemed to be going well . . . & we went to bed expecting glad tidings at sunrise." But the next morning Lincoln told his young secretary: "Well John we are whipped again, I am afraid. The enemy reinforced on Pope and drove back his left wing and he has retired to Centerville where he says he will be able to hold his men. I don't like that expression, I don't like to hear him admit that his men need holding."

¹⁰³ Joseph T. Glatthaar, "McClellan's Tragic Flaws in Light of Modern Psychology," in Glatthaar, Partners in Command: The Relationships between Leaders in the Civil War (New York: Free Press, 1994), 237-42.

¹⁰⁴ Marszelek, Halleck, 145.

¹⁰⁵ Adams S. Hill to Sydney Howard Gay, n.p., n.d., Gay Papers, Columbia University.

Lincoln, however, did not despair. Hay noted that he “was in a singularly defiant tone of mind. He often repeated, ‘We must hurt this enemy before it gets away.’” The following day, when his assistant personal secretary remarked that things looked bad, Lincoln demurred: “No, Mr Hay, we must whip these people now. Pope must fight them, if they are too strong for him he can gradually retire to these fortifications.” Hay thought that it was “due in great measure” to Lincoln’s “indomitable will, that army movements have been characterized by such energy and celerity for the last few days.”¹⁰⁶

A sense of déjà vu came over Lincoln as he contemplated the military situation. “I have heard of people being knocked into the middle of next week, but this is the first time I ever knew of their being knocked into the middle of last year,” he remarked on September 4.¹⁰⁷ Four days later, General James Wadsworth said that the president was “very downcast, and that he has given way to apprehension remarkably.” Things looked as bleak after the second battle of Bull Run as they had after the first. Adams S. Hill thought that during the first week of September, Lincoln “lost much ground in the estimation of the people,” had “fallen from a h[e]ight which no President since Jackson ever occupied before,” and had “dumped himself into the back yard of the American people.” Hill added that “[i]nefficiency [and] indecision are weak words for the case” and speculated that if Hamlin were “more of a man there would be a strong movement for his substitution.” Senator Henry Wilson predicted that the president “couldn’t get one vote in twenty in New England.”¹⁰⁸ Henry Ward Beecher thundered: “It is a supreme and

¹⁰⁶ Burlingame and Ettliger, eds., Hay Diary, 37-38 (entry for 1 September 1862).

¹⁰⁷ Washington correspondence, 4 September, Chicago Tribune, 9 September 1862; Adams S. Hill to Sydney Howard Gay, Washington, 4 September 1862, Gay Papers, Columbia University; Washington correspondence, 8 September, National Anti-Slavery Standard (New York), 13 September 1862.

¹⁰⁸ Adams S. Hill to Sydney Howard Gay, Washington, 8, 12 September 1862, Gay Papers, Columbia University.

extraordinary want of executive administrative talent at the head of the Government that is bringing us to humiliation. Let it be known that the Nation wasted away by an incurable consumption of Central Imbecility.”¹⁰⁹

On August 31, Halleck, who was fatigued by the heavy responsibility resting on his shoulders, appealed pathetically to McClellan: “I beg of you to assist me in this crisis with your ability and experience. I am utterly tired out.”¹¹⁰ With uncharacteristic promptitude, Little Mac responded, criticizing Pope harshly: “to speak frankly, – and the occasion requires it, – there appears to be a total absence of brains, & I fear the total destruction of the army.” He recommended that Pope immediately fall back to Washington, for the capital was, he thought, in grave danger. He told his wife he would try to slip into the city and rescue her silver.¹¹¹

That same day, Lincoln was reportedly “never so wrathful as last night against George.”¹¹² He and Halleck “were very indignant at the dilatory movements of McClellan.”¹¹³ With “great emphasis” the president told Gideon Welles that “there has been a design, a purpose in breaking down Pope, without regard of consequences to the country. It is shocking to see and know this.” On August 30 “[w]e had the enemy in the hollow of our hands” and would have destroyed him “if our generals, who are vexed with Pope, had done their duty. All of our present difficulties and reverses have been brought

¹⁰⁹ Paxton Hibben, Henry Ward Beecher: An American Portrait (New York: G.H. Doran, 1927), 159.

¹¹⁰ Sears, McClellan, 258.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Adams S. Hill to Sydney Howard Gay, Washington, [31 August 1862], Gay Papers, Columbia University.

¹¹³ Washington correspondence, 1 September, Boston Traveler, n.d., copied in the Boston Commonwealth, 6 September 1862.

upon us by these quarrels of the generals.”¹¹⁴ Radical Republicans in Congress shared his view. Michigan Senator Zachariah Chandler detected treason among the army officers.¹¹⁵

Lincoln was also angry at General Fitz John Porter, who was court-martialed and cashiered for failing to support Pope on August 29. Robert Todd Lincoln recalled seeing his father deeply distressed upon learning of Porter’s behavior.¹¹⁶ To a friend he declared that “he knew of no reason to suspect any one [involved in the Second Bull Run campaign] of bad faith except Fitz John Porter” and that “he believed his disobedience of orders, and his failure to go to Pope[’]s aid in the battle . . . had occasioned our defeat, and deprived us of a victory which would have terminated the war.”¹¹⁷ After signing the order dismissing Porter from the service, Lincoln remarked that in “any other country but this, the man would have been shot.” With unwonted severity he asserted that Porter should have been shot.¹¹⁸ (In early August, Porter had called Pope “a fool” who “deserves defeat” and accurately predicted that he “will be whipped.”¹¹⁹ McClellan had made a similar prediction: “Pope will be thrashed during the coming week – & very badly, whipped he will be & ought to be.”)¹²⁰ Republicans applauded Lincoln’s decision, which they regarded as a sign that he would crack down on other disloyal army officers and civilian bureaucrats. “It was a bold act, and he deserves credit for it,” commented a

¹¹⁴ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:113, 116 (entries for 7, 8 September 1862).

¹¹⁵ Zachariah Chandler to Lyman Trumbull, Detroit, 10 September 1862, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

¹¹⁶ Robert Todd Lincoln to Isaac Markens, Manchester, Vermont, 13 July 1918, Robert Todd Lincoln Papers, Chicago History Museum.

¹¹⁷ Pease and Randall, eds., Browning Diary, 1:589 (entry for 29 November 1862).

¹¹⁸ Washington correspondence, by Horace White, 23 January, Chicago Tribune, 28 January 1863; Don E. Fehrenbacher and Virginia Fehrenbacher, eds., Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), 298.

¹¹⁹ [Porter] to Manton Marble, n.p., 10 August 1862, Manton Marble Papers, Library of Congress.

¹²⁰ McClellan to his wife, near Berkeley, 10 August 1862, Sears, ed., McClellan Papers, 389.

Radical journalist.¹²¹ Democrats had anticipated that they could convince him to go easy on Porter, but as D. W. Bartlett noted, when the president “is thoroughly convinced” he “is obstinately courageous. When he is not convinced he is sometimes vacillating.”¹²²

A sense of déjà vu came over Lincoln as he contemplated the military situation. Things looked as bleak after the second battle of Bull Run as they had after the first. “I have heard of people being knocked into the middle of next week, but this is the first time I ever knew of their being knocked into the middle of last year,” he remarked on September 4.¹²³ Four days later, General James Wadsworth reported that the president was “very downcast” and “has given way to apprehension remarkably.”¹²⁴

McClellan’s actions infuriated not only Lincoln and Stanton but other members of the cabinet as well. Seward expressed amazement “that any jealousy could prevent these generals from acting for their common fame and the welfare of the country.”¹²⁵ Bates complained of “a criminal tardiness, a fatuous apathy, a captious, bickering rivalry, among our commanders who seem so taken up with their quick made dignity, that they overlook the lives of their people & the necessities of their country.”¹²⁶

On August 30, Stanton and Chase drew up a remonstrance calling for McClellan’s dismissal. Bates suggested that they tone down this “round robin,” which they did. Smith, Stanton, Bates, and Chase signed it in its amended version, which declared that it was

¹²¹ Washington correspondence, 26 January, National Anti-Slavery Standard (New York), 31 January 1863.

¹²² Washington correspondence by Van [D. W. Bartlett], 28 January, Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 30 January 1863.

¹²³ Washington correspondence, 4 September, Chicago Tribune, 9 September 1862; Adams S. Hill to Sydney Howard Gay, Washington, 4 September 1862, Gay Papers, Columbia University; Washington correspondence, 8 September, National Anti-Slavery Standard (New York), 13 September 1862.

¹²⁴ Adams S. Hill to Sydney Howard Gay, Washington, 8, 12 September 1862, Gay Papers, Columbia University.

¹²⁵ Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 40 (entry for [mid-September 1862?]).

¹²⁶ Sears, McClellan, 254.

their “deliberate opinion that, at this time, it is not safe to entrust to Major General McClellan the command of any of the armies of the United States.”¹²⁷ Welles was sympathetic but thought the remonstrance “discourteous and disrespectful to the President.”¹²⁸ Blair refused to sign, though he agreed that McClellan “could not wisely be trusted with the chief command.” Seward was out of town, perhaps to avoid any confrontation over McClellan.¹²⁹

On September 1, McClellan, who was “mad as a March hare,” had “a pretty plain talk” with Halleck and Lincoln. The president and general-in-chief were alarmed by Pope’s dispatch complaining of the “unsoldierly and dangerous conduct of many brigade and some division commanders of the forces sent here from the Peninsula.” The demoralization of the army seemed “calculated to break down the spirits of the men and produce disaster.” Little Mac reluctantly agreed to accept command of the defense of Washington and to urge officers in the Army of the Potomac to cooperate with Pope.¹³⁰ Halleck, unable or unwilling to lead, had failed in his assignment to produce victory. Little Mac outmaneuvered Old Brains as sure-footedly as he had outmaneuvered Scott.¹³¹

BITTER PILL: RESTORING McCLELLAN TO COMMAND

¹²⁷ A photographic reproduction of that document appears in Frank Abial Flower, Edwin McMasters Stanton: The Autocrat of Rebellion, Emancipation, and Reconstruction (New York: W. W. Wilson, 1905), between pages 190 and 191.

¹²⁸ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:97-98, 100-4 (entries for 31 August, 1 September 1862).

¹²⁹ Niven, ed., Chase Papers, 1:366-68 (diary entry for 2 September 1862); Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:93-95 (entry for 31 August 1862). Seward returned to Washington on September 3 and that evening conferred at length with the president. Washington correspondence, 4 September, Cincinnati Gazette, 5 September 1862. Seward was absent ostensibly in order to encourage recruiting.

¹³⁰ Sears, McClellan, 258-59.

¹³¹ Marszelek, Halleck, 146.

Lincoln was understandably perplexed. His Illinois friend Mark Skinner reported that the president “wanders about wringing his hands and wondering whom he can trust and what he’d better do.”¹³² On September 2, at a “rather animated” cabinet meeting, he appeared “extremely distressed” and “wrung by the bitterest anguish.” He said “he almost felt almost ready to hang himself.”¹³³ He astounded his advisors by announcing that he had set McClellan “to putting these troops into the fortifications of about Washington.” Chase “earnestly and emphatically” protested “that giving the command to him was equivalent to giving Washington to the rebels” and predicted that “it would prove a national calamity.”¹³⁴ When Stanton endorsed those views, Lincoln said that “it distressed him exceedingly to find himself differing on such a point from the Secretary of War and the Secretary of the Treasury; that he would gladly resign his place; but he could not see who could do the work wanted as well as McClellan.” Halleck had proven incapable of command. The president would not budge, for he insisted that McClellan was the best man to protect the capital. The general, he asserted, “knows this whole ground – his specialty is to defend – he is a good engineer, all admit – there is no better organizer – he can be trusted to act on the defensive, but having the ‘slows’ he is good for nothing for an onward movement.” Blair agreed with the president that Little Mac “had

¹³² Nevins and Thomas, eds., Strong Diary, 3:259 (entry for 24 September 1862).

¹³³ Washington correspondence, 2 September, New York Tribune, 3 September 1862; Bates memo, added to a copy of the memo about McClellan to Lincoln from Edwin M. Stanton, Salmon P. Chase, Caleb B. Smith, and Edward Bates, [September 2, 1862], Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:105 (entry for 2 September 1862).

¹³⁴ Niven, ed., Chase Papers, 1:368-69 (diary entry for 2 September 1862); Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:105 (entry for 2 September 1862).

beyond any officer the confidence of the army.”¹³⁵ Halleck shared this opinion, Lincoln added.

The president said that he understood why the cabinet opposed McClellan and that, according to Bates, he “was far from doubting our sincerity, but that he was so distressed, precisely because he knew we were earnestly sincere. He was, manifestly alarmed for the safety of the City. He had been talking with Gen Halleck . . . & had gotten the idea that Pope's army was utterly demoralized – saying that ‘if Pope's army came within the lines (of the forts) as a mob, the City w[oul]d be overrun by the enemy in 48 hours!!” Bates argued that “if Halleck doubted his ability to defend the City, he ought to be instantly, broke. 50,000 men were enough to defend it against all the power of the enemy. If the City fell, it would be by treachery in our leaders, & not by lack of power to defend.”¹³⁶ The meeting adjourned without a discussion of the anti-McClellan round robin, which Lincoln never saw.

Two days thereafter, Lincoln concluded that McClellan, for all his faults, was at that moment indispensable because of his popularity within the army.¹³⁷ “Unquestionably he has acted badly toward Pope,” the president acknowledged. “He really wanted him to fail. That is unpardonable, but he is too useful just now to sacrifice.” In the present emergency, “we must use what tools we have.”¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:105 (entry for 2 September 1862).

¹³⁶ Bates memo, added to a copy of the memo about McClellan to Lincoln from Edwin M. Stanton, Salmon P. Chase, Caleb B. Smith, and Edward Bates, [2 September 1862], Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

¹³⁷ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:113 (entry for 7 September 1862).

¹³⁸ Burlingame and Ettliger, eds., Hay Diary, 39 (entry for 5 September 1862).

Seward, who admired McClellan, was assigned the task of informing the general of his appointment to defend the capital. At first Little Mac balked, but Seward finally persuaded him to accept.¹³⁹

Lincoln justifiably feared that the military might revolt if Little Mac were not given the command. On August 31, General Carl Schurz chatted with some brigadiers in the Army of the Potomac who “spoke of our government in Washington with an affectation of supercilious contempt.”¹⁴⁰ According to General Jacob D. Cox, McClellan boasted “that people had assured him that the army was so devoted to him that they would as one man enforce any decision he should make as to any part of the war policy.”¹⁴¹ A reporter who was at first indignant at the reappointment of McClellan changed his mind when he learned that “ninety thousand of our best troops were almost in a mutinous condition . . . because Gen. McClellan was not their commander.” This journalist, who strongly opposed slavery, concluded that “Lincoln did the very best thing he could do. Admit that the necessity was a melancholy one, nevertheless it was a most imperative necessity.”¹⁴² William O. Stoddard recalled that “a host of tongues and pens” were busily asserting “that the officers and men of the Army of the Potomac half-way refuse to serve under any other commander than McClellan.”¹⁴³ Whitelaw Reid heard a prominent public man remark: “I have been spending the afternoon talking with one of our leading Generals on this very subject of a possible coup d’etat. He has given me an

¹³⁹ Maunsell B. Field, Memories of Many Men and of Some Women (New York: Harper, 1874), 270-71.

¹⁴⁰ Carl Schurz, The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz (3 vols.; New York: McClure, 1907-1908), 2:382.

¹⁴¹ Jacob D. Cox, Military Reminiscences of the Civil War (2 vols.; New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1900), 1:209.

¹⁴² Washington correspondence, 8 September, National Anti-Slavery Standard (New York), 13 September 1862.

¹⁴³ Stoddard, Inside the White House in War Times: Memoirs and Reports of Lincoln’s Secretary, ed. Michael Burlingame (1890; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 91.

inside view of military machinations, and I tell you, we have more than one General who has been trying to shape events so as to make himself dictator.” Reid found it significant “that the idea begins to be tolerated as a possibility” beyond the circle of proslavery officers.¹⁴⁴ According to the Washington National Intelligencer, a high-ranking general in the Army of the Potomac warned that if someone other than McClellan were put in charge, it would be hard to predict whether the Confederate army or the Union army “should first get to Washington.”¹⁴⁵ Michigan Senator Zachariah Chandler speculated that “traitor Generals” would soon remove Lincoln and establish a military dictatorship.¹⁴⁶

To help squelch mutinous stirrings, Lincoln sacked Major John J. Key, who had asserted that the Army of the Potomac had no intention of defeating Lee. When asked by a fellow officer why the army had not pursued the Confederates after Antietam, Key allegedly replied: “The object is that neither army shall get much advantage of the other; that both shall be kept in the field till they are exhausted, when we will make a compromise and save slavery.”¹⁴⁷ When Chase heard about this conversation, he promptly informed the president, who “said he should have the matter examined and if any such language has been used, [Key’s] head should go off.”¹⁴⁸ After Chase’s informant met with Lincoln and repeated his story, Key was summoned to the White House, where he “said he thought slavery was a divine institution, and any issue in this

¹⁴⁴ Washington correspondence, 10 September 1862, Cincinnati Gazette, n.d., in James G. Smart, ed., A Radical View: The “Agate” Dispatches of Whitelaw Reid, 1861-1865 (2 vols.; Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1976), 1:227.

¹⁴⁵ Washington National Intelligencer, 22 August 1862.

¹⁴⁶ Zachariah Chandler to Lyman Trumbull, Detroit, 10 September 1862, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁴⁷ Lincoln to Key, Washington, 26 September 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:442.

¹⁴⁸ Burlingame and Ettliger, eds., Hay Diary, 41 (entry for 26 September 1862).

conflict that did not save it would be disastrous.” Lincoln interrupted: “You may think about that as you please, but no man shall bear a commission of mine, who is not in favor of gaining victories over the rebels, at any and all times.” To show that he was serious, the president immediately cashiered Key “for his silly treasonable talk” and because he feared “it was staff talk” and he “wanted an example.”¹⁴⁹ (Key’s loyalty had been questioned earlier that year when he was appointed provost-marshal of Halleck’s army, evidently at the behest of his brother, Thomas M. Key, an aide to McClellan.)¹⁵⁰

The president found it “humiliating” to restore the army to McClellan, but he insisted that considerations merely personal to himself “must be sacrificed for the public good.”¹⁵¹ He told Pennsylvania Congressman William D. Kelley that “though he acted as commander-in-chief, he found himself in that season of insubordination, panic, and general demoralization consciously under military duress,” for McClellan “had contrived to keep the troops with him, and by charging each new failure to some alleged dereliction of the Secretary of War and President, had created an impression among them that the administration was hostile to him.” Reappointing Little Mac, the president added, “was a good deal like ‘curing the bite with the hair of the dog’” and called the decision to do so

¹⁴⁹ Washington correspondence by John Hay, 1 October, Missouri Republican (St. Louis), 6 October 1862, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln's Journalist, 317; “Record of Dismissal of John J. Key,” 26-27 September 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:442-43; Lincoln to Key, Washington, 24 November 1862, *ibid.*, 5:508; Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:146 (entry for 24 September 1862); Washington correspondence, 29 September, New York Tribune, 30 September 1862; Washington correspondence, 2 October New York Evening Post, 3 October 1862; Washington correspondence, 3 October, New York Times, 4 October 1862.

¹⁵⁰ Washington correspondence, 2 October, New York Tribune, 3 October 1862; Washington correspondence, 1 October, Cincinnati Commercial, 2 October 1862. Though he was from Indiana, Key was rumored “to have large contingent interests in the Slave States.” Washington correspondence, 30 September, Philadelphia Inquirer, 1 October 1862.

¹⁵¹ Gideon Welles, Lincoln and Seward (New York: Sheldon, 1874), 197.

“the greatest trial and most painful duty of his official life. Yet, situated as he was, it seemed to him to be his duty.”¹⁵²

Lincoln had no fear that McClellan would mutiny. When John Hay suggested that Little Mac might harbor seditious thoughts, he replied: “McClellan is doing nothing to make himself either respected or feared.”¹⁵³

To Chase and Stanton, McClellan’s reinstatement was “a severe mortification and disappointment.”¹⁵⁴ The treasury secretary said Lincoln’s relationship with the general called to mind “the case of the woman who after yielding everything but the last favor could hardly help yielding that also.”¹⁵⁵ Abolitionists objected vehemently.¹⁵⁶ William Lloyd Garrison found himself “growing more and more skeptical as to the ‘honesty’ of Lincoln,” who was “nothing better than a wet rag.” McClellan’s restoration to command showed that the president “is as near lunacy as any one not a pronounced Bedlamite.”¹⁵⁷ Ohio Congressman John A. Gurley said of Little Mac: “we have lost through him more than fifty thousand lives, [\$]400,000,000, & a years valuable time. God only knows why the President has retained him at the head of the army! I guess Providence designs to prolong this War till we agree to let the Negro go!”¹⁵⁸ Whitelaw Reid, who thought that

¹⁵² William D. Kelley, Lincoln and Stanton: A Study of the War Administration of 1861 and 1862 (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1885), 74-75.

¹⁵³ Burlingame and Ettliger, eds., Hay Diary, 41 (entry for 26 September 1862).

¹⁵⁴ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:109 (entry for 3 September 1862).

¹⁵⁵ On September 8 Chase told this to Adams Hill. Hill to Sydney Howard Gay, Washington, 8 September 1862, Gay Papers, Columbia University.

¹⁵⁶ Hans L. Trefousse, The Radical Republicans: Lincoln’s Vanguard for Racial Justice (New York: Knopf, 1969), 200.

¹⁵⁷ Garrison to Oliver Johnson, Boston, 9 September 1862, Walter M. Merrill, ed., Letters of William Lloyd Garrison (6 vols.; Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971-1981), 5:112.

¹⁵⁸ Gurley to Thaddeus Stevens, Cincinnati, 22 August 1862, Beverly Wilson Palmer, ed., The Selected Papers of Thaddeus Stevens (2 vols.; Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997-98), 1:319.

Hooker, Heintzelman, or Sedgwick would have been a better choice than McClellan, lamented that the president's "superabundant kindness of heart so often overcomes his better judgment."¹⁵⁹

The tenderhearted president tried to comfort Pope, whom the cabinet viewed as "a braggart" who was "unequal to the position assigned him."¹⁶⁰ On September 3, Lincoln met with the general and "assured him of his entire satisfaction with his conduct; assured him that McClellan's command was only temporary; and gave him reason to expect that another army of active operations would be organized at once" which Pope would lead.¹⁶¹ Lincoln allowed him to read letters that Porter had sent during the campaign sharply criticizing Pope, who said that this "communication of the president to me opened my eyes to many matters which I had before been loath to believe."¹⁶² In response, Pope composed a screed excoriating Porter and McClellan. On September 4, Lincoln allowed him to read that document to him and the secretary of the navy, who described it as "not exactly a bulletin nor a report, but a manifesto, a narrative, tinged with wounded pride and a keen sense of injustice and wrong." The following day the cabinet agreed that it should not be published.¹⁶³ The president acted on the report, however, by having Generals Porter, Franklin, and Griffin relieved from duty and brought before courts of inquiry. He also told Chase that McDowell should ask for such a court to help clear his

¹⁵⁹ Washington correspondence by Agate [Whitelaw Reid], 8 September, Cincinnati Gazette, 11 September 1862.

¹⁶⁰ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:105 (entry for 2 September 1862).

¹⁶¹ Niven, ed., Chase Papers, 1:370 (diary entry for 3 September 1862).

¹⁶² Peter Cozzens, General John Pope: A Life for the Nation (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 196.

¹⁶³ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:109-10 (entry for 4 September 1862); Niven, ed., Chase Papers, 1:370 (diary entry for 3 September 1862); Pope to Lincoln, Ball's Cross Roads, 5 September 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

name. That thoroughly unpopular general did so.¹⁶⁴ When newspapers ran Pope's report, Lincoln said that it was unfortunate but that the leak could never be traced to the cunning general.¹⁶⁵

The president believed that Pope's services should be acknowledged. He "spoke favorably of Pope, and thought he would have something prepared for publication by Halleck."¹⁶⁶ He described Pope "as brave, patriotic, and as having done his whole duty in every respect in Virginia, to the entire satisfaction of himself and Halleck."¹⁶⁷ But he felt that Pope must be sacrificed because "there was an army prejudice against him." A Sioux Indian uprising in Minnesota needed attention, and on September 6, Pope was sent to quell it. Lincoln said that Pope thought of himself as the "most talented general in the world and the one most wronged" and left for that mission "very angry, and not without cause, but circumstances controlled us."¹⁶⁸ The exiled general called the president's treatment of him "dastardly & atrocious."¹⁶⁹ (In 1863, Pope continued grouching at length about Lincoln, calling him "the worst enemy I ever had in my life.")¹⁷⁰

Though Pope became the principal scapegoat for the failure of Second Bull Run, sharp criticism was also directed at Lincoln and Stanton. Massachusetts Senator Henry Wilson speculated that Lincoln "couldn't get one vote in twenty in New England," and

¹⁶⁴ Niven, ed., Chase Papers, 1:370 (diary entry for 3 September 1862).

¹⁶⁵ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:126 (entry for 12 September 1862).

¹⁶⁶ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:114 (entry for 7 September 1862).

¹⁶⁷ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:116 (entry for 8 September 1862).

¹⁶⁸ Michael Clodfelter, The Dakota War: The United States Army versus the Sioux, 1862-1865 (Jefferson, N.C.: Mcfarland, 1998), 46; Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 116 (entry for 8 September 1862).

¹⁶⁹ John Pope to Valentine B. Horton, St. Paul, 1 November 1862, Pope Papers, New-York Historical Society.

¹⁷⁰ Pope to Valentine B. Horton, Milwaukee, 9, 25 March 1863, Pope Papers, New-York Historical Society.

Zachariah Chandler called the president “unstable as water.”¹⁷¹ Adams S. Hill, a leading Washington correspondent, reported in early September that “Abraham Lincoln has killed himself this week. Such weakness.”¹⁷² Hill thought that Lincoln “lost much ground in the estimation of the people,” had “fallen from a h[e]ight which no President since Jackson ever occupied before,” and had “dumped himself into the back yard of the American people.” Hill added that “[i]nefficiency [and] indecision are weak words for the case” and speculated that if Hamlin were “more of a man there would be a strong movement for his substitution.”¹⁷³ Henry W. Bellows reported from Washington that the “feeling of indignation at the inefficiency or incompetence of the Government is intense.” He believed that the nation’s “political concerns are so loosely & inertly managed that it sends contagious weakness & demoralization through the Army.”¹⁷⁴ Henry Ward Beecher thundered: “It is a supreme and extraordinary want of executive administrative talent at the head of the Government that is bringing us to humiliation. Let it be known that the Nation wasted away by an incurable consumption of Central Imbecility.”¹⁷⁵ The New York Evening Post declared that despite Lincoln’s “personal popularity” and “the general confidence in his good intentions,” the “effect of his management has been such that . . . a large part of the nation is utterly discouraged and despondent.” It was widely believed, the paper said, “that treachery lurks in the highest quarters.” Such suspicion and

¹⁷¹ Adams S. Hill to Sydney Howard Gay, Washington, 8, 12 September 1862, Gay Papers, Columbia University; Zachariah Chandler to Lyman Trumbull, Detroit, 10 September 1862, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁷² Adams S. Hill to Sydney Howard Gay Papers, n.p., n.d. [Washington, early September 1862], Gay Papers, Columbia University.

¹⁷³ Adams S. Hill to Sydney Howard Gay, Washington, 8, 12 September 1862, Gay Papers, Columbia University.

¹⁷⁴ Henry W. Bellows to his wife, Washington, 3, 16 September 1862, Bellows Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

¹⁷⁵ Hibben, Beecher, 159.

demoralization grew “out of the weakness and vacillation of the Administration, which itself has grown out of Mr. Lincoln’s own want of decision and purpose.”¹⁷⁶ A leading Indiana Republican lamented that the “President, in his anxiety to do right, has vacillated and is fast losing the confidence of his friends, and the respect of his enemies.”¹⁷⁷

Lincoln tried to deflect such criticism by stating “that he was ‘under bonds’ to let Halleck have his own way in everything in regard to the army: to make no appointments or removals even without his advice or consent.”¹⁷⁸ At the close of the order restoring the army to McClellan, only Halleck’s name appeared. To former governor William Dennison of Ohio, Lincoln explained: “I found I must select one man to command all the armies of the United States, and thought it may be possible that Halleck is not a great General, I firmly believe he is the best I have got.” Therefore “he left military matters entirely to General Halleck.” He added that “Stanton had no more to do with military movements than a clerk. He is like a Secretary of War in time of peace – he attends to all the duties of his office, but does not plan a campaign anywhere.”¹⁷⁹

But after Second Bull Run, the opposite was actually the case; Halleck became, in effect, a clerk, while Stanton resumed his earlier status as a co-planner of the war effort.¹⁸⁰ In 1864, Lincoln remarked that Old Brains at first had accepted the full power

¹⁷⁶ New York Evening Post, 15 September 1862.

¹⁷⁷ John S. Davis to Henry Lane, New Albany, Indiana, 26 October 1862, typescript, Lane Papers, Indiana University.

¹⁷⁸ Lincoln allegedly told this to his friend Mark Skinner, a Chicago judge sitting on the U. S. Sanitary Commission, who in turn told it to Frederick Law Olmsted. Olmsted to Henry Whitney Bellows, Washington, 22 September 1862, Jane Turner Censer, ed., The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, Vol. 4: Defending the Union, The Civil War and the U.S. Sanitary Commission, 1861-1863 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 426.

¹⁷⁹ Washington correspondence, 4 August, New York Evening Post, 5 August 1862; Washington correspondence, Boston Transcript, n.d., copied in the Portland Oregonian, 25 September 1862.

¹⁸⁰ Marszalek, Halleck, 158.

and responsibility of a true general-in-chief and persisted “till Pope’s defeat, but ever since that event, he had shrunk from the responsibility whenever it was possible.” After that setback “he broke down – nerve and pluck all gone” and became “little more since that [time] than a first-rate clerk.”¹⁸¹ In early September, Halleck told his wife of “the terrible anxiety I have had within the last month” and complained that he was “greatly dissatisfied with the way things go here. There are so many cooks, they destroy all the broth. I am tired and disgusted with the working of this great political machine.”¹⁸²

(Hooker contemptuously likened Halleck to a man who wed with the understanding that he would not have sex with his bride.)¹⁸³

Especially exasperating to the president was Old Brains’ “habitual attitude of demur.”¹⁸⁴ According to Assistant Secretary of War Charles A. Dana, “the first impulse of his mind toward a new plan was not enthusiasm; it was analysis, criticism.”¹⁸⁵ Halleck had other flaws. Caleb B. Smith thought that he demoralized the army by treating volunteer officers with “the utmost contempt.” In Smith’s view, he was unqualified for his post by a lack of talent, genius, and success.¹⁸⁶ After a conversation with the general,

¹⁸¹ Burlingame and Ettliger, eds., Hay Diary, 192, 183 (entries for 28 April, 24 March 1864). Cf. Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:180 (entry for 4 November 1862).

¹⁸² Halleck to Elizabeth Hamilton Halleck, Washington, 5, 9 September 1862, Schoff Civil War Collection, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

¹⁸³ Hooker to Zachariah Chandler, 3 May 1863, Chandler Papers, in Williams, Lincoln and His Generals, 302.

¹⁸⁴ Noah Brooks, Washington, D. C., in Lincoln’s Time, ed. Herbert Mitgang (1895; Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 43.

¹⁸⁵ Charles A. Dana, Recollections of the Civil War: With the Leaders at Washington and in the Field in the Sixties (New York: D. Appleton, 1898), 187.

¹⁸⁶ Smith to Thurlow Weed, Washington, 29 September 1862, Weed Papers, University of Rochester.

George Templeton Strong confided to his diary that Halleck was “weak, shallow, commonplace, vulgar,” and that his “silly talk was conclusive as to his incapacity.”¹⁸⁷

But Lincoln kept Halleck on as a technical advisor, a translator of presidential wishes into military parlance, a shield against criticism, and an administrator. In these roles he proved useful.¹⁸⁸ Halleck described his function as “simply a military adviser of the Secretary of War and the President” who “must obey and carry out what they decide upon.”¹⁸⁹ General Jacob D. Cox accurately referred to Halleck as a “bureau officer in Washington.”¹⁹⁰

KEY TURNING POINT: QUASI-VICTORY AT ANTIETAM

On September 3, instead of besieging Washington, the Army of Northern Virginia began splashing across the upper Potomac and entered Maryland, spreading panic throughout that state and Pennsylvania. Lincoln was not alarmed, for he had said earlier, when asked about the possibility of a Confederate invasion of the Free State, “that there was exactly where he would have them; & where the military men would have them.”¹⁹¹

For Lincoln, the vexing question of command arose once again: who should lead the Union forces pursuing Lee? (McClellan had been given control only of the Washington forts.) Halleck declined the job when Lincoln offered it to him indirectly.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁷ Nevins and Thomas, eds., Strong Diary, 3:258 (entry for 24 September 1862).

¹⁸⁸ Simon, “Lincoln and Halleck,” 83.

¹⁸⁹ Halleck to William T. Sherman, Washington, 16 February 1864, OR, I, 32, 3:408.

¹⁹⁰ Cox, Reminiscences, 1:151.

¹⁹¹ Adams S. Hill to Sydney Howard Gay, n.p., n.d. [Washington, ca. late August 1862], Gay Papers, Columbia University. Lincoln told Gustavus Fox that he wished Lee would invade Maryland. Gustavus V. Fox to his wife Virginia, Washington, 29 August 1862, Fox Papers, New-York Historical Society.

¹⁹² Sears, McClellan, 263.

Burnside also demurred, asserting that he was “unequal to the position.”¹⁹³ Chase thought that Joseph Hooker or Edwin V. Sumner might do, but his opinion was not widely shared.¹⁹⁴ By default, the choice settled on McClellan.¹⁹⁵ (When elderly John E. Wool learned that he had been passed over yet again, he bitterly complained that Lincoln was “a joker” lacking “the first qualification to govern a great people,” a man who “delights in relating smutty stories” and whose pets, most notably McClellan, “have all failed.”)¹⁹⁶

On September 5, Halleck and the president called on Little Mac and asked him to take charge of the army in the field. The decision, which essentially restored the Army of the Potomac to McClellan (Pope’s army had been given to him three days earlier) was doubtless Lincoln’s, though for some unknown reason he ascribed it to Halleck.¹⁹⁷ Banks replaced McClellan in charge of the capital’s fortifications.¹⁹⁸

Morale soared when the army heard that McClellan had resumed command. “Our troops know of none other they can trust,” explained Major Alexander Webb.¹⁹⁹ “It makes my heart bleed,” Little Mac wrote his wife on September 5, “to see the poor shattered remnants of my noble Army of the Potomac, poor fellows! and to see how they love me now. I hear them calling out to me as I ride among them – ‘George – don’t leave us again!!’ ‘They shan’t take you away from us again’ etc. etc.”²⁰⁰

¹⁹³ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:124 (entry for 12 September 1862).

¹⁹⁴ Chase to Zachariah Chandler, Washington, 20 September 1862, Niven, ed., Chase Papers, 3:275.

¹⁹⁵ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:124 (entry for 12 September 1862).

¹⁹⁶ Wool to Harriette Hart, Baltimore, 24 September 1862, Wool Papers, New York State Library, Albany.

¹⁹⁷ John Pope to Valentine B. Horton, Milwaukee, 25 March 1863, Pope Papers, New-York Historical Society; Sears, McClellan, 263-64; Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:122, 124 (entries for 11 and 12 September 1862).

¹⁹⁸ Harrington, Banks, 85.

¹⁹⁹ Sears, McClellan, 265.

²⁰⁰ Sears, ed., McClellan Papers, 435.

That same day, Lincoln observed that “McClellan is working like a beaver. He seems to be aroused to do something, by the sort of snubbing he got last week.” Though “he can’t fight himself,” the president observed, “he excels in making others ready to fight.”²⁰¹

Restoring the troops’ morale seemed vital to Lincoln, who told Welles that he “was shocked to find that of 140,000 whom we were paying for in Pope’s army, only 60,000 could be found. McClellan brought away 93,000 from the Peninsula, but could not to-day count on over 45,000.” The president believed “that some of our men permitted themselves to be captured in order that they might leave on parole, get discharged, and go home.” Plaintively he asked: “Where there is such rottenness, is there not reason to fear for the country?” Chase shared Lincoln’s concern, acknowledging that if McClellan had not been restored to command, the Northern cause at that delicate moment might be placed in severe jeopardy.²⁰²

As he led his army into Maryland, McClellan wrote his wife that the “feeling of the Govt towards me is kind & trusting. I hope with God’s blessing, to justify the great confidence they now repose in me, & will bury the past in oblivion.”²⁰³ Lincoln predicted that if the general did not win a victory, both of them “would be in a bad row of stumps.”²⁰⁴ But he was not sanguine. In early August, he ruefully told a group who criticized Little Mac: “McClellan must be a good military man. Everybody says he is. These military men all say so themselves, and it isn’t possible that they can all be so

²⁰¹ Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 38 (entry for 5 September 1862).

²⁰² Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:117, 118 (entry for 8 September 1862).

²⁰³ Sears, ed., McClellan Papers, 438.

²⁰⁴ Ward Hill Lamon, Recollections of Abraham Lincoln, 1847-1865, ed. Dorothy Lamon Teillard (Washington: the editor, 1911), 289.

completely deceived as some of you insist. He is well versed in military matters, and has had opportunities of experience and observation. Still there must be something wrong somewhere, and I'll tell you what it is, he never embraces his opportunities, – that's where the trouble is – he always puts off the hour for embracing his opportunities.”²⁰⁵ More succinctly, the president told Welles: “I can never feel confident that he will do anything effectual.”²⁰⁶ The navy secretary also feared that Little Mac would “persist in delays and inaction” and “do nothing affirmative.” To be successful, Welles thought, the general “must rid himself of what President Lincoln calls the ‘slows.’”²⁰⁷

McClellan's leisurely progress in Maryland confirmed such suspicions. On September 12, Lincoln told his cabinet that the general “can't go ahead – he can't strike a blow. He got to Rockville for instance on Sunday night [September 8], and in four days he advanced to Middlebrook, ten miles in pursuit of an invading enemy. This was rapid movement for him.”²⁰⁸ Lincoln seriously considered meeting with McClellan, but Banks and Halleck warned him it would be risky to leave Washington while Lee's troops were nearby.²⁰⁹

Characteristically overestimating the enemy numbers by a wide margin, McClellan appealed for reinforcements. (In fact, the Army of the Potomac contained 75,000 effective troops to Lee's 38,000.)²¹⁰ Lincoln ordered Fitz John Porter's corps to join that army and telegraphed McClellan on September 11: “I am for sending you all

²⁰⁵ Washington correspondence by Agate [Whitelaw Reid], 6 August, Cincinnati Gazette, 11 August 1862.

²⁰⁶ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:116 (entry for 8 September 1862).

²⁰⁷ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:118, 129 (entries for 8 and 12 September 1862).

²⁰⁸ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:124 (entry for 12 September 1862).

²⁰⁹ Nathaniel P. Banks to Lincoln, Washington, 12 September 1862; Halleck to Lincoln, Washington, 12 September 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

²¹⁰ Sears, McClellan, 274-78, 303.

that can be spared, & I hope others can follow Porter very soon.”²¹¹ When Lee seemed to be retreating, Lincoln urged McClellan: “Please do not let him get off without being hurt.”²¹²

Pennsylvanians grew panicky as Lee headed northward. When Governor Andrew G. Curtin appealed for 80,000 troops, Lincoln patiently explained his inability to comply: “We have not to exceed eighty thousand disciplined troops, properly so called, this side of the mountains, and most of them, with many of the new regiments, are now close in the rear of the enemy supposed to be invading Pennsylvania. Start half of them to Harrisburg, and the enemy will turn upon and beat the remaining half, and then reach Harrisburg before the part going there, and beat it too when it comes. The best possible security for Pennsylvania is putting the strongest force possible into the enemies rear.”²¹³ To another skittish resident of the Keystone State, who feared that the Confederates would seize Philadelphia, the president offered reassurances: “Please do not be offended when I assure you that, in my confident belief, Philadelphia is in no danger. . . . At all events Philadelphia is more than a hundred and fifty miles from Hagerstown, and could not be reached by the rebel Army in ten days, if no hinderance was interposed.”²¹⁴

On September 15, Lincoln rejoiced to hear that the Army of the Potomac had the previous day beaten the enemy at South Mountain, though he could not know that McClellan’s dispatch announcing the victory exaggerated its significance. The Rebels, the general telegraphed Halleck, were retreating “in a perfect panic,” and “Lee last night

²¹¹ Lincoln to McClellan, Washington, 11 September 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:415.

²¹² Lincoln to McClellan, Washington, 12 September 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:418.

²¹³ Lincoln to Curtin, Washington, 12 September 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:417.

²¹⁴ Lincoln to Alexander Henry, Washington, 12 September 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:417-18.

stated publicly that he must admit they had been shockingly whipped.”²¹⁵ (How he knew about Lee’s remarks was unexplained.) Lincoln sent congratulations: “God bless you, and all with you. Destroy the rebel army, if possible.”²¹⁶ He told a friend, “I now consider it safe to say that Gen. McClellan has gained a great victory over the great rebel army in Maryland. He is now pursuing the flying foe.”²¹⁷

In fact, however, the Confederates were not flying but consolidating their scattered forces after capturing the 11,500-man Union garrison at Harper’s Ferry on September 15. (Lincoln deplored this calamity, saying that McClellan “could and ought to have prevented the loss of Harper’s Ferry, but was six days marching 40 miles, and it was surrendered.”)²¹⁸ Little Mac, having fortuitously obtained a copy of Lee’s orders two days earlier (this document became famous as the Lost Order), knew that the Confederate commander had divided his army. McClellan could have scored a smashing victory if he had acted swiftly to take advantage of that news, but his characteristically slow movement permitted the enemy to regroup. Having won what he assumed was a major victory at South Mountain, he ignored the president’s injunction to destroy the Army of Northern Virginia but instead was content to let it recross the Potomac, which he mistakenly thought it was doing. He was startled to learn that the Rebels were in reality forming a line of battle near Antietam Creek. For three and a half days after the discovery of the Lost Order, Lee’s army had been in grave danger; now its components were

²¹⁵ Sears, ed., McClellan Papers, 462.

²¹⁶ Lincoln to McClellan, Washington, 15 September 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:426.

²¹⁷ Lincoln to J. K. Dubois, Washington, 15 September 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:425-26.

²¹⁸ Pease and Randall, eds., Browning Diary, 1:590 (entry for 29 November 1862).

reunited and ready to fight the Army of the Potomac. Little Mac had forfeited what he properly deemed the “opportunity of a lifetime.”²¹⁹

On September 17, the bloodiest single day’s battle of the war was fought at Antietam Creek, where the Army of the Potomac suffered 12,000 casualties and the Army of Northern Virginia 14,000. The result was in effect a draw, with neither side clearly victorious, though Lee abandoned the field. Lincoln believed that the Confederate army could be annihilated before it crossed the Potomac if only McClellan would act promptly. Little Mac had committed only two-thirds of his men to battle; the remainder, reinforced by 12,000 freshly-arrived troops, could have attacked effectively on September 18. But that day the passive Union general allowed Lee to slip back to Virginia unharmed, much to the chagrin of the president, who moaned once again: “he never embraces his opportunities.”²²⁰ A week after the battle, Lincoln told Edward Everett “that nothing could have been better fought than the battle of Antietam; but that he did not know why McClellan did not follow up his advantage.”²²¹

Others were equally puzzled. In Missouri, a Union colonel lamented that the “Campaign on the Potomac is another failure on our part, and I can[’]t understand the motive inducing Lincoln to hold onto McClellan. He don’t move. If we had displayed half the Energy on the Potomac that the Rebels have we could now see the end of this war.” Morale among western troops, he noted, was sinking because “so little good results

²¹⁹ Sears, McClellan, 270.

²²⁰ Sears, McClellan, 319; Washington correspondence by Whitelaw Reid, 22 September 1862, Smart, ed., Agate Dispatches, 1:232.

²²¹ Edward Everett diary, entry for 25 September 1862, Massachusetts Historical Society.

from what has been done.”²²² Gustavus Fox thought the loss of the Harper’s Ferry garrison more than offset the advantage gained at Antietam, since Lee was allowed to escape with his army intact.²²³ (A week after the battle, Fox told Lincoln that his anxious wife insisted that he write her daily assurances that Washington was safe. The president “said that put him in mind of the fellow in the Democratic convention in Illinois. The question was upon dispensing with the roll call as the convention was large and much time would be consumed. This fellow said he was not certain as he was present and he would like to have the roll called to make sure of it.”)²²⁴

COLONIZATION SCHEMES

With Lee in retreat, Lincoln’s mind turned to the Emancipation Proclamation which had for weeks been lying in his desk drawer. Since announcing to the cabinet his intention to issue it, he had been preparing the public mind to accept so momentous a step. To that end, he once again raised the colonization proposal. In mid-August, he gave a hint of future developments when he urged a group of Washington blacks to emigrate to Panama. The president realized that colonization would be politically necessary if emancipation were in the offing, for only something acceptable to conservative whites could be effectively provided for the freedmen. He told Kansas Senator Samuel C. Pomeroy that “he would emancipate as soon as he was assured that his colonization project would succeed.” To Pomeroy, Lincoln often quoted Kentucky Senator Garrett

²²² W. W. Orme to David Davis, Springfield, Missouri, 19 October 1862, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

²²³ Gustavus V. Fox to his wife Virginia, Washington, 19 September 1862, Fox Papers, New-York Historical Society.

²²⁴ Gustavus V. Fox to his wife Virginia, Washington, 23 September [1862], Fox Papers, New-York Historical Society.

Davis's remark that Unionists in the Bluegrass State "would not resist his gradual emancipation scheme if he would only conjoin with it his colonization plan."²²⁵ John Palmer Usher of Indiana (arguably the most Negrophobic state in the North) told Lincoln that a colonization plan "will, if adopted, relieve the free states of the apprehension now prevailing, and fostered by the disloyal, that they are to be overrun by negroes made free by the war, [and] it will alarm those in rebellion, for they will see that their cherished property is departing from them forever and incline them to peace."²²⁶ Orestes Brownson, who favored colonization, estimated that 75% of Northern voters were anti-slavery and 90% anti-black.²²⁷

A few colonizationists argued that blacks would never receive decent treatment from American whites and would fare better abroad. From St. Louis, the sometime poet and civil servant William Davis Gallagher wrote his close friend Salmon P. Chase about slaves who escaped from bondage in the interior of Missouri but could find no work at St. Louis and were unable to obtain passes to visit Illinois. Discouraged, they decided to return to their masters. Indignantly Gallagher exclaimed "in this manner the disability of color in the Border States . . . is operating to strengthen the hands of the very rebels who have brought upon the country its grievous troubles! If these poor people were out of the State, employment could be found for most if not all of them in neighboring parts of Illinois," but the Black Laws of the Prairie State forbade them entrance. Gallagher scorned the hypocrisy of many Northerners: "The very people that at one moment denounce slave-holders as tyrants and sinners, the next moment turn their backs and shut

²²⁵ Adams S. Hill to Sydney Howard Gay, Washington, 25 August 1862, Gay Papers, Columbia University.

²²⁶ Usher to Lincoln, Washington, 2 August 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

²²⁷ Speech by Brownson, 26 August, Washington Evening Star, 27 August 1862.

their doors against the poor slaves whom accident or repentance has set free. Before we have Emancipation . . . I hope we shall have matured a system of Colonization: for it we have not, God pity the poor Negro!”²²⁸

The timing of the White House meeting, which represented the first occasion that a group of blacks was invited there to consult on public policy, suggests that Lincoln was trotting out colonization to smooth the way for emancipation. If he had been truly enthusiastic about colonization, he might well have acted more swiftly on the appropriation that Congress had voted months earlier to fund the emigration of Washington’s blacks. Evidently, Lincoln urged colonization not primarily because he still believed in it but rather because he wished to make emancipation more palatable to the Border States, to Unionists in the Confederacy, and to Northern conservatives. There is good reason to accept the analysis of one observer who regarded the meeting as an attempt “to throw dust into the eyes of the Kentucky slaveholders.”²²⁹

James Mitchell, a Methodist minister and a former agent of the American Colonization Society, set up the meeting. Lincoln had worked with Mitchell in Illinois and in 1862 appointed him commissioner of emigration in the Interior Department. Three months earlier, at the president’s behest, Mitchell published an open letter endorsing gradual emancipation and colonization. In July, he urged Lincoln to persuade black Washingtonians to take the lead in colonization, noting that “the Colored people of this District . . . for the most part are less inclined to remove therefrom than the Contrabands.” A “great emigration from the ranks of the Colored residents of the District” would not

²²⁸ W. D. Gallagher to Salmon P. Chase, St. Louis, 12 February 1862, Chase Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

²²⁹ Professor F. W. Newman to the editor of the English Leader, 1 September 1864, copied in the National Anti-Slavery Standard (New York), 8 October 1864.

occur, for “they are to a great extent satisfied with their new liberties and franchises, with hopes of further enlargement.” It “will require time to enable them to realize that they are near the summit now – education must refine their sensibility, and a purer morality than has yet obtained amongst the free people of Color, must actuate them, before they will feel that an escape from their present relation to the American people is a duty and a privilege.”²³⁰ Lincoln sought to instruct them about their duty.

Colonization had been debated in Congress that spring and summer, with Missouri Representative Frank Blair and Wisconsin Senator James R. Doolittle, along with some Border State colleagues, supporting it enthusiastically. Blair asserted that it “was the negro question, and not the slavery question which made the rebellion, questions entirely different and requiring different treatment. . . . If the rebellion was made by two hundred and fifty thousand slave-holders, for the sake of perpetuating slavery, then it might be a complete remedy to extirpate the institution; but if the rebellion has grown out of the abhorrence of the non-slaveholders for emancipation and amalgamation, and their dread of ‘negro equality,’ how will their discontent be cured by the very measure [emancipation] the mere apprehension of which has driven them into rebellion?” Colonization therefore must follow emancipation.²³¹ Doolittle cited familiar arguments in support of colonization, which he said was “in accordance with the natural laws of climate, in accordance with the difference of constitution existing between these two races; a solution to which nature itself is pointing; a solution by which the tropics are to be given to the man of the tropics, and the temperate zone to the man of the temperate

²³⁰ James Mitchell to Lincoln, Washington, 1 July 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

²³¹ Congressional Globe, 37th Congress, 2nd session, 1632 (11 April 1862).

zone. . . . it is God's solution; and it is easier to work with Him than to work against Him, and wiser, too.”²³²

On July 16, a special congressional committee endorsed an emancipation scheme that included colonization, recommended an appropriation of \$20,000,000 to facilitate the voluntary emigration of American blacks, and noted that the most serious objections to emancipation arose “from the opposition of a large portion of our people to the intermixture of the races, and from the association of white and black labor. The committee would do nothing to favor such a policy; apart from the antipathy which nature has ordained, the presence of a race among us who cannot, and ought not to, be admitted to our social and political privileges, will be a perpetual source of injury and inquietude to both. This is a question of color, and is unaffected by the relation of master and slave.” The “most formidable difficulty which lies in the way of emancipation,” the committee argued, was “the belief, which obtains especially among those who own no slaves, that if the negroes shall become free, they must still continue in our midst, and, so remaining after their liberation, they may in some measure be made equal to the Anglo-Saxon race.” The “Anglo-American will never give his consent that the negro, no matter how free, shall be elevated to such equality. It matters not how wealthy, how intelligent, or how morally meritorious the negro may become, so long as he remains among us the recollection of the former relation of master and slave will be perpetuated by the changeless color of the Ethiop's skin, and that color will alike will be perpetuated by the degrading tradition of his former bondage.” The “highest interests of the white race, whether Anglo-Saxon, Celt, or Scandinavian, require that the whole country should be

²³² Ibid., appendix, 99 (11 April 1862).

held and occupied by those races alone.” Therefore a home “must be sought for the African beyond our own limits and in those warmer regions to which his constitution is better adapted than to our own climate, and which doubtless the Almighty intended the colored race should inhabit and cultivate.”²³³ Congressional pressure to do something about colonization may well have prompted Lincoln to summon the black Washingtonians.

The president’s widely-reported remarks to those men indirectly signaled his intention to emancipate at least some slaves. (A reporter who had been invited to attend the meeting published a verbatim account of it. Lincoln doubtless wanted the proceedings publicized to show the electorate that he was committed to colonization.) On August 14, after cordially shaking hands with the five black leaders who gathered at the White House, he reviewed the recent legislative history of colonization measures. In April and July, Congress had appropriated a total of \$600,000 for colonizing blacks abroad. The Second Confiscation Act of July 17 authorized Lincoln to “make provision for the transportation, colonization, and settlement in some tropical country beyond the limits of the United States, such persons of the African race, made free by the provisions of this act, as may be willing to emigrate, having first obtained the consent of the Government of said country to their protection and settlement within the same, with all the rights and privileges of freeman.” Lincoln said that he wanted to consult with his guests about how that money should be spent. In justifying colonization, which he had supported for many years in Illinois, he remarked: “You and we are different races. We have between us a broader difference than exists between almost any other two races. Whether it is right or

²³³ “Report of the Select House Committee on Emancipation and Colonization,” House Reports no. 148, 37th Congress, 2nd session, issued 16 July 1862 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1862), 14-16.

wrong I need not discuss, but this physical difference is a great disadvantage to us both, as I think your race suffer very greatly, many of them by living among us, while ours suffer from your presence. In a word we suffer on each side. If this is admitted, it affords a reason at least why we should be separated.”

Lincoln acknowledged that American slaves were the victims of a uniquely cruel form of oppression: “Your race are suffering, in my judgment, the greatest wrong inflicted on any people.” Free blacks as well as slaves experienced discrimination: “even when you cease to be slaves, you are yet far removed from being placed on an equality with the white race. You are cut off from many of the advantages which the other race enjoy. The aspiration of men is to enjoy equality with the best when free, but on this broad continent, not a single man of your race is made the equal of a single man of ours. Go where you are treated the best, and the ban is still upon you.” Lincoln was careful not to say that blacks were unequal to whites; rather blacks had been placed in an unequal position and made unequal to whites. He did not specify how they had been so placed and so made, but a fair inference would be that whites had done so through discriminatory laws and institutions.

Lincoln asked his guests to consider how best to deal with the harsh reality of slavery and discrimination. “I do not propose to discuss this, but to present it as a fact with which we have to deal. I cannot alter it if I would. It is a fact, about which we all think and feel alike, I and you. We look to our condition, owing to the existence of the two races on this continent. I need not recount to you the effects upon white men, growing out of the institution of Slavery. I believe in its general evil effects on the white race. See our present condition – the country engaged in war! – our white men cutting

one another's throats, none knowing how far it will extend; and then consider what we know to be the truth. But for your race among us there could not be war, although many men engaged on either side do not care for you one way or the other. Nevertheless, I repeat, without the institution of Slavery and the colored race as a basis, the war could not have an existence.” Lincoln was acknowledging that the Civil War was caused by the South’s desire to maintain white supremacy at all costs. If no blacks had been in the country, no war would have occurred. His logic was sound, but the black committeemen doubtless thought to themselves: “It’s not our fault that we’re here! Don’t blame your troubles on us!”

From these hard realities Lincoln concluded that it “is better for us both, therefore, to be separated.” Colonization as he envisioned it would be voluntary. But how to persuade free blacks to leave the country when they did not want to? To this problem Lincoln now turned. Slavery could only be abolished if blacks agreed to emigrate. Those already free owed it to their enslaved brothers and sisters to spearhead a colonization effort: “I know that there are free men among you, who even if they could better their condition are not as much inclined to go out of the country as those, who being slaves could obtain their freedom [only] on this condition. I suppose one of the principal difficulties in the way of colonization is that the free colored man cannot see that his comfort would be advanced by it. You may believe you can live in Washington or elsewhere in the United States the remainder of your life [comfortably], perhaps more so than you can in any foreign country, and hence you may come to the conclusion that you have nothing to do with the idea of going to a foreign country. This is (I speak in no unkind sense) an extremely selfish view of the case. But you ought to do something to

help those who are not so fortunate as yourselves. There is an unwillingness on the part of our people, harsh as it may be, for you free colored people to remain with us.”

Lincoln said that educated free blacks should take the lead by volunteering to be colonized, for they would serve as role models for slaves who might eventually be liberated. “If we deal with those who are not free at the beginning, and whose intellects are clouded by Slavery, we have very poor materials to start with. If intelligent colored men, such as are before me, would move in this matter, much might be accomplished. It is exceedingly important that we have men at the beginning capable of thinking as white men, and not those who have been systematically oppressed.”

Lincoln appealed to his guests’ altruism. “There is much to encourage you. For the sake of your race you should sacrifice something of your present comfort for the purpose of being as grand in that respect as the white people. It is a cheering thought throughout life that something can be done to ameliorate the condition of those who have been subject to the hard usage of the world. It is difficult to make a man miserable while he feels he is worthy of himself, and claims kindred to the great God who made him. In the American Revolutionary war sacrifices were made by men engaged in it; but they were cheered by the future. Gen. Washington himself endured greater physical hardships than if he had remained a British subject. Yet he was a happy man, because he was engaged in benefiting his race – something for the children of his neighbors, having none of his own.”

To the practical question of just where American blacks might move, Lincoln at first pointed to Africa. “The colony of Liberia has been in existence a long time. In a certain sense it is a success. The old President of Liberia, [Joseph Jenkins] Roberts, has

just been with me – the first time I ever saw him. He says they have within the bounds of that colony between 300,000 and 400,000 people The question is if the colored people are persuaded to go anywhere, why not there? One reason for an unwillingness to do so is that some of you would rather remain within reach of the country of your nativity. I do not know how much attachment you may have toward our race. It does not strike me that you have the greatest reason to love them. But still you are attached to them at all events.”

Another possible relocation site would be in the Chiriqui province of Panama, then part of Colombia (also known as New Grenada). Early proponents of colonization, including Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Benjamin Lundy, had preferred the Western Hemisphere to Africa. In more recent times, the Blair family (especially Frank) had championed colonization there. Other antislavery leaders, including Lyman Trumbull and Richard Bissell of Illinois, James R. Doolittle, Gerrit Smith, and Theodore Parker concurred.²³⁴ In 1861 and early 1862, Mexico and lightly-populated Central American nations expressed interest in such schemes.²³⁵

In urging his black callers to support colonization in Panama, Lincoln pointed out that that country “is nearer to us than Liberia – not much more than one-fourth as far as Liberia, and within seven days’ run by steamers. Unlike Liberia it is on a great line of travel – it is a highway. The country is a very excellent one for any people, and with great natural resources and advantages, and especially because of the similarity of climate with your native land – thus being suited to your physical condition. The particular place I

²³⁴ Frederic Bancroft, "Schemes to Colonize Negroes in Central America," in Jacob E. Cooke, ed., Frederic Bancroft: Historian (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), 192-96.

²³⁵ Thomas Schoonover, “Misconstrued Mission: Expansionism and Black Colonization in Mexico and Central America during the Civil War,” Pacific Historical Review 49 (1980): 611-14.

have in view is to be a great highway from the Atlantic or Caribbean Sea to the Pacific Ocean, and this particular place has all the advantages for a colony. On both sides there are harbors among the finest in the world. Again, there is evidence of very rich coal mines. A certain amount of coal is valuable in any country, and there may be more than enough for the wants of the country.” Mining the coal “will afford an opportunity to the inhabitants for immediate employment till they get ready to settle permanently in their homes. If you take colonists where there is no good landing, there is a bad show; and so where there is nothing to cultivate, and of which to make a farm. But if something is started so that you can get your daily bread as soon as you reach there, it is a great advantage. Coal land is the best thing I know of with which to commence an enterprise.”

Lincoln tried to convince the black leaders that the Chiriqui project was not a corrupt scheme designed to enrich a few greedy swindlers: “you have been talked to upon this subject, and told that a speculation is intended by gentlemen, who have an interest in the country, including the coal mines. We have been mistaken all our lives if we do not know whites as well as blacks look to their self-interest. Unless among those deficient of intellect everybody you trade with makes something. You meet with these things here as elsewhere. If such persons have what will be an advantage to them, the question is whether it cannot be made of advantage to you. You are intelligent, and know that success does not as much depend on external help as on self-reliance. Much, therefore, depends upon yourselves. As to the coal mines, I think I see the means available for your self-reliance. I shall, if I get a sufficient number of you engaged, have provisions made that you shall not be wronged. If you will engage in the enterprise I will spend some of the money intrusted to me.”

Lincoln carefully warned his black guests that settlers had no guarantee that they would prosper in Chiriqui: “I am not sure you will succeed. The Government may lose the money, but we cannot succeed unless we try; but we think, with care, we can succeed. The political affairs in Central America are not in quite as satisfactory condition as I wish. There are contending factions in that quarter; but it is true all the factions are agreed alike on the subject of colonization, and want it, and are more generous than we are here. To your colored race they have no objection.”

Lincoln expressed a keen desire to make sure that American blacks would not become second-class citizens in Panama. He pledged to the black delegation that he “would endeavor to have you made equals, and have the best assurance that you should be the equals of the best. The practical thing I want to ascertain is whether I can get a number of able-bodied men, with their wives and children, who are willing to go, when I present evidence of encouragement and protection. Could I get a hundred tolerably intelligent men, with their wives and children, to ‘cut their own fodder,’ so to speak? Can I have fifty? If I could find twenty-five able-bodied men, with a mixture of women and children, good things in the family relation, I think I could make a successful commencement. I want you to let me know whether this can be done or not. This is the practical part of my wish to see you. These are subjects of very great importance, worthy of a month’s study, [instead] of a speech delivered in an hour. I ask you then to consider seriously not pertaining to yourselves merely, nor for your race, and ours, for the present time, but as one of the things, if successfully managed, for the good of mankind -- not confined to the present generation, but as

‘From age to age descends the lay,

To millions yet to be,
Till far its echoes roll away,
Into eternity.”²³⁶

(Earlier that day, Lincoln had told Liberian President Roberts and William McLain, a financial agent for the American Colonization Society, that he believed Liberia would be a suitable locale for free blacks to settle. Angry at Lincoln's inconsistency in praising Liberia as a venue for colonization then criticizing it a short time later, McLain denounced the Chiriqui plan: “Out upon all such men and such schemes!”)²³⁷

The black delegation promised to consider Lincoln's request carefully. Two days later its chairman, Edward M. Thomas, who headed the Anglo African Institute for the Encouragement of Industry and Art, told the president that he had originally opposed colonization but that he had changed his mind and would like authorization to proselytize in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia on behalf of that scheme.²³⁸

Some of Thomas's fellow blacks supported emigration, including well-known men like Henry Highland Garnet, Lewis Woodson, and Martin R. Delany.²³⁹ (In 1865, Lincoln met with Delany and appointed him a major in the army, the first black to achieve so high a rank.)²⁴⁰ Support for colonization among blacks had grown during the 1850s. In 1854, a black emigration convention in Cleveland had discussed a large-scale

²³⁶ Address on Colonization to a Deputation of Blacks, 14 August 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:370-75.

²³⁷ W. W. McLain to R. R. Gurley of Haddenfield, N.J., Washington, 26 August 1862, American Colonization Society Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (microfilm copy).

²³⁸ Thomas to Lincoln, Washington, 16 August 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

²³⁹ Floyd J. Miller, The Search for a Black Nationality: Black Emigration and Colonization, 1787-1863 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 170-263.

²⁴⁰ Frank A. Rollin [Frances E. Rollin Whipper], Life and Times of Martin R. Delany (Boston: Lee and Shepherd, 1868), 166-71.

exodus. Delany inspected sites in the Niger Valley for the relocation of his fellow blacks; James Whitefield did the same in Central America; and James Theodore Holly looked into the West Indies.²⁴¹ In 1858, blacks in New York under the leadership of Henry Highland Garnet founded the African Civilization Society to encourage black emigration to Yoruba. In 1862, Congress received petitions from 250 blacks in California, expressing the desire to be colonized “in some country in which their color will not be a badge of degradation,” and from blacks in the District of Columbia, asking to be sent to Central America.²⁴² A few years earlier, Owen Lovejoy had introduced into the Illinois legislature “a remonstrance from the colored people of the State against their colonization in Africa, until they are all able to read and write, and unless separate colonies be assigned to those of different shades of color. The reason assigned for the latter objection is, that blacks and mulattoes cannot live in harmony together.”²⁴³

A journalist characterized Lincoln’s remarks to the black delegation as “very sympathetic and paternal,” manifesting “his sincere and earnest desire to see them [black people] invested with the rights and privileges of real freemen.” Remarkable was the president’s willingness to make the “humiliating statement” that “the semi-civilized States of South America ‘are more generous’ than the great model Republic.”²⁴⁴ Henry Highland Garnet lauded the Chiriqui scheme as “the most humane, and merciful

²⁴¹ Richard Blackett, “Martin R. Delany and Robert Campbell: Black Americans in Search of an African Colony,” Journal of Negro History 62 (1977): 1-25; Martin R. Delany et al., “Political Destiny of the Colored Race on the American Continent,” appendix 3 of Report of the Select Committee on Emancipation and Colonization, House Report no. 148, 37th Congress, 2nd session, 37-59; David M. Dean, Defender of the Race: James Theodore Holly, Black Nationalist Bishop (Boston: Lambeth Press, 1979).

²⁴² Washington correspondence, 18 January, New York Times, 19 January 1862; Joseph Enoch Williams et al. to the Honorable the Senate and House of Representatives, [April 1862], 37A-G21.4, Select Committee on Emancipation, Petitions & Memorials, ser. 467, 37th Congress, RG 233 [D-83].

²⁴³ Alton, Illinois, Telegraph, 15 January 1855.

²⁴⁴ Washington correspondence, by B. F. M., 15 August, Cincinnati Gazette, 20 August 1862.

movement which this or any other administration has proposed for the benefit of the enslaved.”²⁴⁵

Most black leaders, however, were less enthusiastic. Among them was Robert Purvis, a well-to-do Philadelphian, who wrote Lincoln a stinging public letter: “It is in vain you talk to me about ‘two races’ and their ‘mutual antagonism.’ In the matter of rights, there is but one race, and that is the human race. God has made of one blood all nations, to dwell on the face of the earth. . . . Sir, this is our country as much as it is yours, and we will not leave it.”²⁴⁶ Another black in the City of Brotherly Love predicted that Lincoln’s colonization scheme would “arouse prejudice” and “increase enmity against us, without bringing with it the remedy proposed or designed.”²⁴⁷ Fellow townsmen published An Appeal from the Colored Men of Philadelphia to the President of the United States acknowledging that many blacks were “[b]enighted by the ignorance entailed upon us, oppressed by the iron-heel of the master who knows no law except that of worldly gain and self-aggrandizement” and asking “why should we not be poor and degraded? . . . We regret the ignorance and poverty of our race.” But, they pointed out, “[m]any of us, in Pennsylvania, have our own houses and other property, amounting, in the aggregate, to millions of dollars. Shall we sacrifice this, leave our homes, forsake our birth-place, and flee to a strange land, to appease the anger and prejudice of the traitors now in arms against the Government, or their aiders and abettors in this or in foreign

²⁴⁵ Henry Highland Garnet to Thomas Hamilton, 11 October 1862, in the Pacific Appeal, October-November, 1862.

²⁴⁶ Purvis to Samuel C. Pomeroy, Philadelphia, 28 August 1862, New York Tribune, 30 September 1862.

²⁴⁷ Christian Recorder, 23 August 1862.

lands?”²⁴⁸ To a rally in Manhattan, the Rev. Mr. William T. Cato declared that the president was “pandering to the mob spirit.”²⁴⁹

Frederick Douglass excoriated the president for appearing “silly and ridiculous” by uttering remarks which revealed “his pride of race and blood, his contempt for negroes and his canting hypocrisy.” Douglass scouted the administration’s entire record on slavery: “Illogical and unfair as Mr. Lincoln’s statements are, they are nevertheless quite in keeping with his whole course from the beginning of his administration to this day, and confirms the painful conviction that though elected as an anti-slavery man by Republican and Abolitionist voters, Mr. Lincoln is quite a genuine representative of American prejudice and negro hatred and far more concerned for the preservation of slavery, and the favor of the Border States, than for any sentiment of magnanimity or principle of justice and humanity.” Lincoln, in Douglass’s view, was saying to blacks: “I don’t like you, you must clear out of the country.” The polite tone of Lincoln’s remarks “is too thin a mask not to be seen through,” for they lacked the “genuine spark of humanity” and a “sincere wish to improve the condition of the oppressed.”²⁵⁰ Hyperbolically Douglass declared that “the nation was never more completely in the hands of the Slave power.”²⁵¹

White Radicals were also disenchanted. Lamenting the president’s remarks, Chase confided to his diary: “How much better would be a manly protest against

²⁴⁸ J. C. Davis and several others to Lincoln, August 1862, in An Appeal from the Colored Men of Philadelphia to the President of the United States, in Herbert Aptheker, ed., A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States (New York: Citadel Press, 1951), 474.

²⁴⁹ George B. Vachon to Lincoln, [September 1862], in C. Peter Ripley, ed., The Black Abolitionist Papers (5 vols.; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985-1992), 5:152.

²⁵⁰ Douglass’s Monthly, September 1862, 707-708.

²⁵¹ Douglass to Gerrit Smith, Rochester, 8 September 1862, Smith Papers, Syracuse University; Douglass’s Monthly, January 1862, 577.

prejudice against color! – and a wise effort to give freemen homes in America.”²⁵²

William Lloyd Garrison, a long-time opponent of colonization, scornfully wrote that Lincoln’s “education (!) with and among ‘the white trash’ of Kentucky was most unfortunate for his moral development.” If the president understood that it “is not their color, but their being free, that makes their presence here intolerable,” he “would sooner have the earth opened and swallow him up, than to have made the preposterous speech he did.” Garrison further declared Lincoln’s words to be “puerile, absurd, illogical, impertinent, untimely.” As for the ability of blacks and whites to co-exist, Garrison insisted that everyone “differs from everybody else in height, bulk, and looks. Is any one of these ‘physical differences,’ more than another, a justifiable ground for colonization? The whole thing is supremely ridiculous.”²⁵³ Fellow abolitionist Beriah Green could scarcely contain his indignation. “Such braying – babbling – chattering Lincoln indulged in in his interview with ‘the Negro Delegation!’” he exclaimed. “Enough to turn the stomach of an ostrich! Such driveling folly! Such brazen impudence! Such glaring selfishness! Such a ‘blind Leader of the Blind!’”²⁵⁴

The Chicago Tribune objected on practical grounds: “The blacks can neither be colonized across the Gulf, [n]or sent through our lines to the North. Their numbers utterly forbid and render futile these measures save on the most limited scale.”²⁵⁵ The New York Times also demurred: “No, Mr. President. The enfranchised blacks must find homes,

²⁵² Niven, ed., Chase Papers, 1:352 (diary entry for 15 August 1862).

²⁵³ The Liberator (Boston), 22 August 1862.

²⁵⁴ Beriah Green to Gerrit Smith, Whitesboro, N.Y., 12 September 1862, Smith Papers, Syracuse University.

²⁵⁵ Chicago Tribune, 26 September 1862.

without circumnavigating the seas at the National expense.”²⁵⁶ Democrats scoffed at the proposal. The New York Evening Express protested that Lincoln’s scheme would “entail upon the White Labor of the North, the doom and debt of the tax-groaning serfs and labor-slaves of Europe.”²⁵⁷

Despite the support of chairman Edward M. Thomas for colonization, eventually the delegation of black Washingtonians rejected Lincoln’s advice, asserting that it was “inexpedient, inauspicious and impolitic to agitate the subject of emigration of the colored people of this country anywhere We judge it unauthorized and unjust for us to compromise the interests of over four and a half millions of our race by precipitate action on our part.”²⁵⁸

As if that rejection were not enough to kill the Chiriqui scheme, an aroma of corruption further undermined support for it. There was good reason to suspect corruption. The plan to colonize blacks in the Chiriqui province was the brainchild of a wealthy Philadelphia businessman, Ambrose W. Thompson, who alleged that he owned large tracts of land there.²⁵⁹ In the 1850s, he formed the Chiriqui Improvement Company and unsuccessfully attempted to persuade the navy department to buy Panamanian coal. In August, 1861, when Thompson offered to sell coal at half the market price if American blacks could be colonized there to work the mines, he attracted congressional support.²⁶⁰ To investigate the matter Lincoln appointed a commission and enlisted the aid of his

²⁵⁶ New York Times, 1 October 1862.

²⁵⁷ New York Evening Express, 23 September 1862.

²⁵⁸ The Anti-slavery Reporter and Aborigines’ Friend, 222.

²⁵⁹ On Thompson, see Paul J. Scheips, “Ambrose W. Thompson: A Neglected Isthmian Promoter,” MA thesis, University of Chicago, 1949.

²⁶⁰ New York Congressman Charles Baldwin Sedgwick to Welles, Washington, 7 August 1861, copy, A. W. Thompson Papers, Library of Congress.

brother-in-law, Ninian Edwards, who reported favorably on the plan to purchase cheap coal from the Chiriqui Company. In November, Interior Secretary Smith echoed those sentiments.²⁶¹ The following month, Francis P. Blair, Sr., supplied the president with an elaborate brief endorsing Thompson's scheme, which he said might yield several desirable results, including "the acquisition of safe and well fortified Harbors on each side of the Isthmus – a good and sufficient Railway transportation between them – a command of the coal-fields to afford adequate supply for our Navy – A million of acres of land for the colonization of American Freeman in Homesteads and freeholds."²⁶² Chase told the president that he was "much impressed with the prospects" that the contract offered.²⁶³ On November 15, Thompson reported that "Lincoln is willing to make a contract for coal, at one dollar less per ton than Govt now pays."²⁶⁴ Twelve days later the president urged Chase to endorse the contract if it could be done "consistently with the public interest."²⁶⁵ The day after Christmas, Assistant Secretary of the Interior John P. Usher reported that Lincoln "is quite anxious to make the arrangement but is held back by the objection of Seward," who "thinks that the Government had better make the arrangements direct with the New Grenadian Government," and by the objection of Chase, "who complains on account of the money."²⁶⁶

²⁶¹ Smith to Lincoln, Washington, 4 November 1862, copy, Ambrose W. Thompson Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁶² Blair to Lincoln, Silver Spring, Maryland, 16 November 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁶³ Chase to Lincoln, Washington 12 November 1861, *ibid.*

²⁶⁴ Thompson to Francis P. Blair, Sr., Washington, 15 November 1861, Blair-Lee Papers, Princeton University.

²⁶⁵ Lincoln to Chase, Washington, 27 November 1861, Roy P. Basler, ed., Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, First Supplement (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1974), 112.

²⁶⁶ Usher to Richard W. Thompson, Washington, 26 December 1861, Richard W. Thompson Papers, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne.

Navy Secretary Welles, whom Lincoln had asked to review the contract, raised a more telling objection: he alleged “that there was fraud and cheat in the affair,” that it “appeared to be a swindling speculation,” and that the entire project “was a rotten remnant of an intrigue of the last administration.”²⁶⁷ Congressman Thaddeus Stevens, chairman of the House Committee on Ways and Means, agreed. In investigating Thompson’s claim to the land, Stevens and his colleagues “found that he had not a particle of title to an inch of it; and if he had the whole thing was not worth a dollar. . . . the whole country is so unhealthy as to be wholly uninhabitable.”²⁶⁸ Two supporters of the scheme, Senators John P. Hale of New Hampshire and James F. Simmons of Rhode Island, were so ethically insensitive that the latter had to resign his seat and the former was defeated for reelection because of his alleged corruption.²⁶⁹

In the spring of 1862, when Congress appropriated money for colonizing the freedmen of Washington, Lincoln instructed Secretaries Chase and Smith to reexamine Thompson’s proposal.²⁷⁰ The busy Chase delegated the task to Treasury Solicitor Edward Jordan, who joined Smith in endorsing a plan to have the Chiriqui Improvement Company provide coal for the navy and to colonize blacks on its land.²⁷¹ The president

²⁶⁷ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:150-51 (entry for 26 September 1862).

²⁶⁸ Thaddeus Stevens to [Salmon] P. Chase, Lancaster, 25 August 1862, in Palmer, ed., Papers of Stevens, 1:319-20.

²⁶⁹ John P. Usher to R. W. Thompson, Washington, 1 January 1862, Richard W. Thompson Papers, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne.

²⁷⁰ Smith to Ambrose W. Thompson, Washington, 26 April 1862, Ambrose W. Thompson Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁷¹ Smith to Lincoln, Washington, 9 and 16 May 1862, copies, Ambrose W. Thompson Papers, Library of Congress; Edward Jordan to Chase, Washington, 22 March 1862, pamphlet, ibid.; Edward Jordan to A. W. Thompson, Washington, 22 March 1864, copy, ibid.

received similar advice from Assistant Secretary Usher, and also from James Mitchell.²⁷² Joining in the lobbying effort on behalf of Thompson's company was Kansas Senator Samuel C. Pomeroy, who was authorized in late August to issue a public appeal, sanctioned by the president, urging blacks to volunteer for colonization.²⁷³ Though "not inclined to it himself originally," Pomeroy said he would "devote himself with his whole energies to put it through."²⁷⁴ The senator was quickly swamped with applications from blacks eager to leave, including two sons of Frederick Douglass. Henry Highland Garnet also expressed a desire to join them.²⁷⁵

Lincoln's choice of Pomeroy was curious. To be sure, the senator had helped organize the settlement of the Kansas Territory in the 1850s and might have seemed a likely candidate to assist with a similar enterprise in the tropics. But his integrity was suspect. The New York Tribune described him as a man who "weighed everything by a money standard. He has judged all public measures by the cash that was in them; and estimated all men by the amount it would take to buy them."²⁷⁶ In 1873, a committee of the Kansas legislature found Pomeroy "guilty of the crime of bribery, and attempting to

²⁷² Usher to Lincoln, Washington, 2 August 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Usher to R. W. Thompson, Washington, 25 July 1862, Thompson Papers, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis; Elmo R. Richardson and Alan W. Farley, John Palmer Usher: Lincoln's Secretary of Interior (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1960), 21-23.

²⁷³ Washington correspondence, 25 August, 14 September, New York Tribune, 26 August, 15 September 1862; Washington correspondence, 25 August, New York Herald, 26 August 1862; Pomeroy to Orville H. Browning, Washington, 27 October 1862, photostatic copy, Ambrose W. Thompson Papers, Library of Congress. For the text of Pomeroy's address, see the New York Evening Express, 22 August 1862.

²⁷⁴ Adams S. Hill to Sydney Howard Gay, Washington, 25 August 1862, Gay Papers, Columbia University.

²⁷⁵ Pomeroy to Lincoln, Washington, 16 April 1863, photostatic copy, Ambrose W. Thompson Papers, Library of Congress; Frederick Douglass to Pomeroy, Rochester, 26 August 1862, New York Herald, n.d., copied in Cincinnati Commercial, 4 September 1862; Washington correspondence, 11 September, New York Herald, 13 September 1862; New York Tribune, 16 September 1862.

²⁷⁶ New York Tribune, 30 January 1873.

corrupt by offers of money, members of the Legislature of the State of Kansas.”²⁷⁷

(Pomeroy served as the model for corrupt Senator Dilworthy in The Gilded Age by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner.) Thaddeus Stevens implied that several members of Congress received bribes from the Chiriqui lobby.²⁷⁸

Strangely, Pomeroy had ridiculed the idea of colonization earlier in 1862. How and why he became an enthusiast for it later in the year is unclear. He told James R. Doolittle that the Wisconsin senator’s April 1862 speech on the subject helped change his mind and that he desired more for blacks than his Radical colleagues did: “They want the freedom of the Col’d man – and are satisfied with that. I want for him something more than that – To be a free laborer – and only that, is not his manhood. I want for him the rights & enjoyments – of a free man.” Because blacks’ “full rights & privileges cannot be secured” in the U.S., Pomeroy was “for the Negro’s securing his rights and his nationality – in the clime of his nativity – on the soil of the Tropics.”²⁷⁹ By appointing this shady character, Lincoln may have been trying to win support for colonization from Chase, a friend of Pomeroy’s.²⁸⁰

The lobbying pressure on Lincoln worked, even though the director of the Smithsonian Institution reported that Chiriqui coal was of such poor quality that it was

²⁷⁷ Pomeroy Investigation; Reports of the Joint Committee Appointed by the Legislature of Kansas, 1873, to Investigate Charges of Corruption and Bribery Against Hon. S. C. Pomeroy, and Members of the Legislature (Topeka, 1873), 4.

²⁷⁸ Thaddeus Stevens to [Salmon] P. Chase, Lancaster, 25 August 1862, in Palmer, ed., Stevens Papers, 1:319.

²⁷⁹ Pomeroy to James R. Doolittle, Washington, 20 October 1862, typescript, Doolittle Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

²⁸⁰ Michael Vorenberg, "Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of Black Colonization," Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association 14 (1993): 22-45.

unsuitable for naval vessels.²⁸¹ On September 11, the president provisionally endorsed a contract with the Chiriqui Company to settle at least 50,000 blacks.²⁸² Final authorization would be made if Pomeroy reported favorably after visiting Panama to verify the company's assertions.²⁸³ According to John Palmer Usher, "very many consequential niggers from the North are manifesting a desire to go."²⁸⁴ In fact, by mid-September, 500 "good substantial colored men & women" had prepared to emigrate, and 4000 more placed their names on a waiting list. Pomeroy would escort them to their new homeland and help them get established. The senator was prepared to leave in early October with those 500 emigrants, most of whom were given farm tools as well as "everything necessary to comfort and industry."²⁸⁵

The president's decision to endorse the Chiriqui scheme may have been influenced by an old friend from his days in Congress, Richard W. Thompson, who served as the company's attorney and lobbyist.²⁸⁶ On September 12, the former Indiana congressman and Whig leader received a contract from Ambrose Thompson awarding him 20% of whatever the company might receive for its land.²⁸⁷ But Thompson's involvement in the Chiriqui proposal led to its ultimate abandonment. Calling it a

²⁸¹ Joseph Henry to Frederick W. Seward, Washington, 5 September 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. Decades later, it was reported that the coal contained so much sulphur that it was worthless commercially.

²⁸² Copy of the contract, Ambrose W. Thompson Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁸³ Smith to Pomeroy, Washington, 12 September 1862, photostatic copy, Ambrose W. Thompson Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁸⁴ Usher to Richard W. Thompson, Washington, 17 September 1862, Richard W. Thompson Papers, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne.

²⁸⁵ Washington correspondence, 11, 12 September, New York Tribune, 12, 13 September 1862.

²⁸⁶ Charles Roll, Colonel Dick Thompson: The Persistent Whig (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1948), 122-23.

²⁸⁷ Smith to Pomeroy, Washington, 12 September 1862, photostatic copy, Ambrose W. Thompson Papers, Library of Congress.

“swindle,” the Albany Evening Journal remarked that “Thompson’s connection with the project is enough to stamp its character and purpose” and urged the president “to look well into this scheme before committing himself to it.”²⁸⁸ Lincoln did so. He told Ambrose W. Thompson that he had intended to back the program fully “but that representations had been made to him, that the whole matter was a speculation, a job, that the money required to be paid was not intended to be used in the developing of the property, but in the payment of old debts, judgments, mortgages &c.” He explained that “it had been said his friend Dick Thompson was to get money” for services rendered earlier. Lincoln added that “he was willing to do anything personal to serve” his former colleague in the House of Representatives, “yet he could not go before the people admitting that he had so applied public money, on a contract that was to be appropriated to paying private debts.” He insisted that “no public money should with his knowledge go to pay private debts.”²⁸⁹ Despite this refusal, Lincoln and Thompson remained on good terms.

Other problems arose. Ambrose Thompson’s title to the land proved questionable; the cabinet and some newspapers raised serious doubts about the ethics of Pomeroy and Richard Thompson; and American blacks showed little inclination to emigrate. Most importantly, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, San Salvador, Guatemala, Brazil, and Honduras objected, fearful of becoming “Africanized.” They also regarded the scheme as something akin to the filibustering expeditions of the 1850s.²⁹⁰ As the New York Tribune observed, no nation “would choose to be made the Botany Bay of other nations which

²⁸⁸ Albany Evening Journal, n.d., copied in the New York Times, 4 October 1862.

²⁸⁹ Ambrose W. Thompson to Richard W. Thompson, New York, 6 October 1862, copy, Ambrose W. Thompson Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁹⁰ Washington correspondence, 19 September, New York Tribune, 20 September 1862.

should see fit to pick out a poor, ignorant, despised class of their people for exportation.”²⁹¹ Seward, anticipating that the North might soon be dragged into a war with Europe, wished to maintain good relations with Central and South America. In early October, Lincoln accepted the secretary of state’s advice and shelved the project. It was eventually scrapped.²⁹²

The blacks of Washington who had signed up for Chiriqui protested against the suspension. Unable to see the president, they left a statement for him: “Many of us acting upon your promise to send us so soon as one hundred families were ready, have sold our furniture, have given up our little homes, to go in the first voyage; and now, when more than five times that number have made preparations to leave, we find that there is uncertainty and delay, which is greatly embarrassing to us, and reducing our scanty means until fears are being created that those means being exhausted, poverty in a still worse form than has yet met us, may be our winter prospect.” When a delegation presented this document at the White House, a secretary assured them that Lincoln “was as anxious as he ever was for their departure; that he had placed everything in the hands of Senator Pomeroy of Kansas; and that he could not now see the deputation of colored men, but that he would do so in the course of a few days.”²⁹³ The president did not meet with them later.

In late October, the New York Journal of Commerce recommended that, in light of the opposition of Latin American nations to serve as colonization sites, the black

²⁹¹ New York Tribune, 17 October 1862.

²⁹² Schoonover, “Misconstrued Mission,” 614-20; Warren A. Beck, “Lincoln and Negro Colonization in Central America,” Abraham Lincoln Quarterly 6 (1950): 173-83; Seward to Luis Molina, Washington, 24 September 1862, copy, Ambrose W. Thompson Papers, Library of Congress; Ambrose W. Thompson to Lincoln, 28 March 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁹³ Washington correspondence, 2 November, New York Tribune, 3 November 1862.

volunteers who had signed up for Chiriqui be sent to Liberia instead. When shown this editorial, Lincoln replied: “I am perfectly willing that these colored people should be sent to Liberia, provided they are willing to go: but there’s the rub. I cannot coerce them, if they prefer some other locality. Central America was designated because they showed a willingness to go there. But I would just as soon, and a little rather, send them to Liberia. But where are the people who wish to go there?”²⁹⁴ When Attorney General Bates recommended that the blacks be expelled, Lincoln “objected unequivocally to compulsion. Their emigration must be voluntary and without expense to themselves.”²⁹⁵

Lincoln considered a different colonization scheme suggested by the eccentric former Congressman Eli Thayer of Massachusetts, a militant opponent of slavery who in the 1850s had played a vital role in the struggle to keep Kansas free. In the summer of 1862, Thayer proposed to lead 10,000 black short-term troops to Florida, defeat the enemy there, then have those soldiers discharged and take possession of property confiscated for nonpayment of taxes. Thayer pledged that if his plan were accepted, he could bring Florida back into the Union as a free state within a few months. In January 1863, Lincoln said that the plan “had received the earnest and cordial attention of himself and cabinet, and that while recent military events had forced the postponement of this enterprise for the time by demanding the entire attention and power of the government elsewhere, yet he trusted the delay was but for a few days.”²⁹⁶ The New York Tribune

²⁹⁴ Diary of Donald McLeod, 23 October 1862, McLeod Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

²⁹⁵ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:152 (entry for 26 September 1862).

²⁹⁶ Washington Chronicle, 6 January 1863; Noah Brooks, “Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln,” (July 1865) in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 205; Washington correspondence, 7 September, New York Tribune, 8 September 1862.

endorsed colonization in either Florida or West Texas.²⁹⁷ But nothing came of this scheme.

COLONIZATION IN HAITI: COW ISLAND

Something did come of another plan which Lincoln endorsed on December 31 – a scheme to colonize freed slaves in Haiti.²⁹⁸ Haitian authorities encouraged immigration from the U.S. To expedite matters, James Redpath, a radical abolitionist and devotee of John Brown, was appointed “general agent of emigration to Haiti from the state and province of North America.” In 1861, he persuaded over a thousand American blacks to settle in that Caribbean nation. Frederick Douglass’s newspaper praised Redpath’s efforts. Also helping Repath were several black recruiting agents, including Douglass’s assistant editor, William J. Watkins, the novelist William Wells Brown, Henry Highland Garnet, James Theodore Holly, Richard J. Hinton, and H. Ford Douglas.²⁹⁹ In October 1862, one Bernard Kock submitted to Lincoln a proposal to colonize a twenty-five-square-mile island off the Haitian coast called Ile à Vache (Cow Island), which was virtually deserted. Though Attorney General Bates considered Kock “an arrant humbug” and a “Charleston adventurer,” the president on December 31 approved a contract offering him \$250,000 to take 5,000 American blacks to the island he claimed he had leased from the Haitian government.

²⁹⁷ New York Tribune, 2 May 1862.

²⁹⁸ Frederic Bancroft, “The Ile à Vache Experiment in Colonization,” in Jacob E. Cooke, ed., Frederic Bancroft: Historian (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), 228-58.

²⁹⁹ John R. McKivigan, “James Redpath and Black Reaction to the Haitian Emigration Bureau,” Mid-America 69 (1987): 139-53; Willis D. Boyd, “James Redpath and American Negro Colonization in Haiti, 1860-1862,” The Americas 12 (1955): 169-82.

Preoccupied with other matters that memorable New Years Eve, Lincoln failed to note the contract's flaws. Kock offered no reliable security to guarantee that he would fulfill his end of the bargain, nor did he provide evidence that the Haitian government had approved his scheme. Moreover, no one in the administration knew much about the self-styled "governor of Cow Island." When Kock approached the secretary of state to affix the great seal of the United States to the contract, the skeptical Seward kept it in his possession, effectively scuttling the plan. In April 1863, the contract was cancelled.³⁰⁰

The Cow Island project might have died aborning if Lincoln had not been so enthusiastic about it. The success of the Haitian Emigration Bureau in persuading American blacks to emigrate may have influenced his thinking, though by late 1862 Redpath's enterprise was foundering. The project was kept alive by New York capitalists, including Paul S. Forbes and Charles K. Tuckerman, who had advanced Kock money which was used to prepare the expedition. At the president's request, Seward drafted a contract for Forbes and Tuckerman which allowed them to carry out the provisions of the original agreement with Kock, though it stipulated that the Haitian government must approve and support the plan.

Tuckerman received brusque treatment when he suggested to Lincoln "that all the preliminaries having been satisfactorily arranged, the easiest way to settle the matter would be for him to affix his signature to the document before him."

³⁰⁰ Vorenberg, "Lincoln and the Politics of Black Colonization," 37-42; Seward to Lincoln, Washington, 3 January 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. For more on Bernard Kock and his Ile à Vache colonization scheme, see Kock to Lincoln, October 4, 1862 and January 13, 1863; Jacob R. S. Van Vleet to Lincoln, October 4 and December 11, 1862; and Charles K. Tuckerman to Lincoln, 31 March 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

“O, I know that,” the president responded, “and it would be ‘very easy’ for me to open that window and shout down Pennsylvania Avenue, only I don’t mean to do it – just now.”

Tuckerman recalled that Lincoln “was irritated, and justly irritated, by certain difficulties which had been thrown in his way . . . by opponents of the [colonization] scheme.”

Tuckerman proposed that the president might want more time to consider the matter. “No,” Lincoln replied, “you’ve had trouble enough about it, and so have I,” After perusing the document attentively, he said: “I guess it’s all right,” and signed it.³⁰¹

The contract called for Tuckerman and Forbes to convey 500 American blacks to Cow Island at \$50 per person. There the freedmen were to be given houses, land, education, and medical care, all supervised by Kock. A ship took 453 volunteers to that desolate spot, where nothing had been provided for them and where disease and poisonous insects killed off many. The demoralized survivors, badly mistreated by Kock, longed to return to the U.S.³⁰² After an investigation revealed their plight, Kock was dismissed. In February 1864, Lincoln dispatched a transport to bring back the 368 remaining emigrants, who were in wretched condition. Months later Congress repealed the laws appropriating money for colonization. When it was determined that Tuckerman and Forbes had failed to carry out the provisions of the contract, they received no money despite urgent appeals.³⁰³

³⁰¹ Charles K. Tuckerman, “Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln,” The Magazine of American History, May 1888, 412-13.

³⁰² James De Long to Henry Conard, Aux Cayes, Hayti, 25 June 1863, copy; Ambrose E. Burnside to Lincoln, Cincinnati, 26 June 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

³⁰³ Paul S. Forbes and Charles K. Tuckerman to Lincoln, New York, 13 January 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

Lincoln was partly to blame for this fiasco, for his administration had been careless in negotiating the contract, then remiss in providing supervision to assure that its terms were implemented properly. He certainly did not honor his pledge to the black delegation in August 1862: “I shall, if I get a sufficient number of you engaged, have provision made that you shall not be wronged.” The president’s failure to examine closely the Cow Island contract stands in sharp contrast to the scrutiny he gave the Chiriqui contract a few months earlier.

Complicating the president’s life in the summer of 1862 was a new patronage scramble created by the internal revenue law, which was to go into operation on September 1. The statute established for the first time in American history an income tax, which necessitated the appointment of a tax assessor and a collector for each congressional district. Candidates for these posts helped swell the flood of visitors to the White House, and the presidential desk groaned under enormous batches of recommendations. In late July, after spending half an hour with one caller, Lincoln said to the others waiting in the anteroom: “I want to make a little speech. You all want to see me on business. It is a matter of no importance to me whether I spend my time with half a dozen or with the whole of you, but it is of importance to you. Therefore when you come in, please don’t stay long.” He recommended that each take no more than two minutes.³⁰⁴ The new places were, Lincoln told Chase, “fiercely contested.”³⁰⁵

THE GREELEY LETTER: RESPONDING TO EMANCIPATIONIST PRESSURE

³⁰⁴ Washington correspondence, 25 July, New York Evening Post and New York Herald, 26 July 1862.

³⁰⁵ Lincoln to Chase, Washington, 8 August 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:361-62.

For months prior to the battle of Antietam, the president had come under increasing pressure to issue an emancipation edict.³⁰⁶ Abolitionists were growing ever more critical. “How terribly he will be pilloried in history like Pharaoh!” exclaimed Henry T. Cheever, while Elizur Wright asked impatiently: “Is our own people’s President, after repressing the generals [like Frémont and Hunter], going to delay striking the vital blow himself?”³⁰⁷ On Independence Day, Frederick Douglass thundered that an “administration without a policy is confessedly an administration without brains. . . . we have a right to hold Abraham Lincoln sternly responsible for any disaster or failure attending the suppression of this rebellion. I hold that the rebels can do us no serious harm unless it is done through the culpable weakness, imbecility or unfaithfulness of those who are charged with the high duty, of seeing that the Supreme Law of the land is everywhere enforced and obeyed Lincoln and his cabinet . . . have fought the rebels with the Olive branch. The people must teach them to fight the with the sword.”³⁰⁸

More vituperatively, Wendell Phillips charged that “Mr. Lincoln is conducting this war, at present, with the purpose of saving slavery.” The president, “a first-rate second rate man,” has “no mind whatever,” the fiery Brahmin orator told an audience on August 1. He “may be honest, – nobody cares whether the tortoise is honest or not; he has neither insight, nor prevision, nor decision.” As long as such a tortoise headed the government, it “was digging a pit with one hand and filling it with the other.” Phillips

³⁰⁶ Victor B. Howard, Religion and the Radical Republican Movement, 1860-1870 (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 22-35.

³⁰⁷ Henry T. Cheever to his sister Elizabeth, Worcester, 10 July 1862, Cheever Family Papers, American Antiquarian Society; Wright to Chase, Boston, 6 July 1862, in Philip G. Wright and Elizabeth Q. Wright, Elizur Wright: The Father of Life Insurance (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937), 217.

³⁰⁸ Speech of 4 July 1862, in Philip S. Foner and Yuval Taylor, eds., Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999), 505; Douglass’s Monthly, August 1862.

sneered, “I never did believe in the capacity of Abraham Lincoln. . . . I asked the lawyers of Illinois, who had practiced law with Mr. Lincoln for twenty years, ‘Is he a man of decision, is he a man who can say no?’ They all said: ‘If you had gone to the Illinois bar, and selected the man least capable of saying no, it would have been Abraham Lincoln. He has no stiffness in him.’” Phillips implied a hope that Confederates would bombard Washington, kill Lincoln, and thus make Hamlin president.³⁰⁹ (From the White House, William O. Stoddard wrote that Phillips “is no longer the apostle of great reform . . . but seems voluntarily to take his true place as a mere vulgar agitator and sensation spouter.” Lincoln was probably referring to Phillips when he described a “well-known abolitionist orator” as “a thistle” and exclaimed: “I don’t see why God lets him live!”)³¹⁰

The Radical Polish exile, Count Adam Gurowski, characterized Lincoln as a man with “a rather slow intellect, with slow powers of perception.” The president, he said, “has no experience of men and events, and no knowledge of the past. . . . Slavery is his mammy, and he will not destroy her.”³¹¹ Henry Ward Beecher lamented that Northerners “have been made irresolute, indecisive and weak by the President's attempt to unite impossibilities; to make war and keep the peace; to strike hard and not hurt; to invade sovereign States and not meddle with their sovereignty; to put down rebellion without touching its cause.”³¹² The president had no “spark of genius,” “element of leadership,”

³⁰⁹ Wendell Phillips, Speeches, Lectures, and Letters (Boston: J. Redpath, 1863), 448, 456, 454, 452, 455, 459-60, 453.

³¹⁰ Washington correspondence, 18 August, New York Examiner, 21 August 1862, Michael Burlingame, ed., Dispatches from Lincoln's White House: The Anonymous Civil War Journalism of Presidential Secretary William O. Stoddard (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 95; John Eaton, Grant, Lincoln, and the Freedmen: Reminiscences of the Civil War with Special Reference to the Work for the Contrabands and Freedmen of the Mississippi Valley (New York: Longmans, Green, 1907), 184.

³¹¹ New York Herald, 11 December 1862.

³¹² The Independent (New York), 14 August 1862, in William C. Beecher and Samuel Scoville, A Biography of Rev. Henry Ward Beecher (New York: C. L. Webster, 1888), 333.

or “particle of heroic enthusiasm,” Beecher charged.³¹³ William Lloyd Garrison fumed that the “Stumbling, halting, prevaricating, irresolute, weak, besotted” president “is blind as a bat” to the administration’s “true line of policy.”³¹⁴ A disgusted New Yorker told Gerrit Smith that if “our revolutionary fathers were to look down on such a miserable, emasculated set of so-called leaders as we now have, and should fail to spit upon them, it w[oul]d only be from simple inability.”³¹⁵ Beriah Green, known as “abolition’s ax,” called Lincoln “the presiding bloodhound of the nation.”³¹⁶

Congress was also growing restive. “Mr. Lincoln desires God to liberate them [the slaves], without compromising him in any way! and if He will do it Himself, Mr. Lincoln will cheerfully submit to it!” exclaimed Senator James Harlan of Iowa sarcastically.³¹⁷ Congressman Frederick Pike of Maine predicted in August that unless Lincoln “follows along after public sentiment more rapidly than he seems disposed to do there will be howling before the snow flies. He exhibits immense deference to the opinions of Kentucky.”³¹⁸ Summing up the mood of Radicals, Thaddeus Stevens disgustingly noted on August 10, “we are just as far from the true course as ever. Unless the people speak in their primary assemblies, no good will come, and there seems little chance of that. A change of Cabinet is our only hope; but I do not hope for that.”³¹⁹

³¹³ The Independent (New York), 17 July 1862 in Allan Nevins, The War for the Union (4 vols.; New York: Scribner, 1959-1971), 2:301, and in Hibben, Beecher, 159.

³¹⁴ The Liberator (Boston), 25 July 1862.

³¹⁵ Andrew J. Graham to Gerrit Smith, 11 August 1862, in Ralph Volney Harlow, Gerrit Smith, Philanthropist and Reformer (New York: H. Holt, 1939), 435.

³¹⁶ Beriah Green to Gerrit Smith, Whitesboro, N.Y., 21 August 1862, Smith Papers, Syracuse University.

³¹⁷ Harlan to George B. Cheever, Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, 4 September 1862, Cheever Family Papers, American Antiquarian Society.

³¹⁸ Frederick Pike to J. S. Pike, Calais, 3 August 1862, Pike Papers, University of Maine.

³¹⁹ Stevens to Simon Stevens, Lancaster, 10 August 1862, Palmer, ed., Papers of Stevens, 1:318.

Sydney Howard Gay, managing editor of Horace Greeley's Tribune, received a similar complaint from a fellow New Yorker, who said the "people are uneasy, anxious, and suspicious" that "there is not & never has been any serious determination to put down the rebels."³²⁰ When Gay forwarded this missive to the White House, Lincoln invited him to visit. Gay asked several questions which Lincoln refused to answer either officially or semi-officially but indirectly replied by saying to each one: "I shouldn't wonder." Gay recounted this interview to a friend, who reported that "he returned to New York feeling like a mariner who has made an observation in some sunny interval between long days of clouds and storms."³²¹ After their conversation, the president described Gay as "a truly good man, and a wise one;" in turn, Gay became "quite enamored of the President, & convinced that although slowish, he is perfectly sure."³²²

Other Radicals dogged Lincoln's heels. On July 4, when Charles Sumner urged that Independence Day be reconsecrated by issuing a emancipation decree, the president said it was "too big a lick," arguing that "half the army would lay down its arms, if emancipation were declared," and that "three more States would rise" – Kentucky, Missouri, and Maryland.³²³ The following month, when Sumner once more lobbied him on behalf of emancipation, Lincoln counseled patience: "Wait – time is essential."³²⁴

³²⁰ "Enquirer" to the editor of the New York Tribune, Auburn, N.Y., 28 July 1862, enclosed in Sydney Howard Gay to Lincoln, New York, 30 July [1862], Gay Papers, Columbia University.

³²¹ Rossiter Johnson in the New York Tribune, n.d., copied in the Staten Islander, 29 April 1891.

³²² H. L. Stevens to Sydney Howard Gay, New York, 7 September 1862, Gay Papers, Columbia University; George William Curtis to "My darling girl," Staten Island, 17 August 1862, Curtis Papers, Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences.

³²³ Adams Hill to Sydney Howard Gay, [Washington, 9 July 1862], Sydney Howard Gay Papers, Columbia University.

³²⁴ Sumner to Elizabeth, Duchess of Argyll, 11 August 1862, Edward Lillie Pierce, Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner (4 vols.; Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1877-1893), 4:84.

Helping Sumner apply pressure were Thaddeus Stevens and Henry Wilson. Those three lawmakers, Lincoln complained to Missouri Senator John B. Henderson, “simply haunt me with their importunities for a Proclamation of Emancipation. Wherever I go and whatever way I turn, they are on my trail; and still in my heart, I have the deep conviction that the hour has not yet come.” One day when he spied those three Radicals approaching the White House, he told Henderson that he was reminded of a schoolmate of his who had trouble reading aloud the Biblical description of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace. For mispronouncing their names, the lad received a blow from his teacher. After his tears finally stopped, he was dismayed to be called upon again to read a passage where those men reappeared. When he wailed aloud, the instructor asked what was wrong. “Look there,” he said pointing to the verses he was to read, “there come them same damned fellows again.”³²⁵

When another importunate Radical senator demanded that the slaves be freed, Lincoln asked: “will Kentucky stand that?”

“Damn Kentucky!” came the reply.

“Then damn you!” exclaimed the president, who seldom resorted to profanity.³²⁶

The assertiveness of some Quakers also aroused Lincoln’s ire. On June 20, he addressed a delegation of Progressive Friends who presented him a memorial calling for emancipation. He was relieved, he said, “to be assured that the deputation were not applicants for office, for his chief trouble was from that class of persons. The next most

³²⁵ Henderson quoted in Adlai E. Stevenson, Something of Men I Have Known, with Some Papers of a General Nature, Political, Historical, and Retrospective (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1909), 352-353.

³²⁶ Moncure Daniel Conway, “A Southern Abolitionist’s Memories of Mr. Lincoln,” London Fortnightly Review, June 1865, in Rufus Rockwell Wilson, ed., Intimate Memories of Lincoln (Elmira, N.Y.: Primavera Press, 1945), 182.

troublesome subject was Slavery.” He concurred with them in thinking “that Slavery was wrong, but in regard to the ways and means of its removal, his views probably differed from theirs.” Their memorial seemed to imply that if he did not promptly issue an emancipation proclamation, he would be violating the spirit of his 1858 House Divided speech. Lincoln resented the suggestion that he had betrayed his earlier stance. According to Pennsylvania Congressman William D. Kelley, who observed this exchange, the president “sought to repel this covert imputation upon his integrity and veracity” and “replied with an asperity of manner of which I had not deemed him capable.” Lincoln said that the quotation they cited was taken out of context. (“A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave & half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved – I do not expect the house to fall – but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other.”) The delegation should have included “another sentence, in which he indicated his views as to the effect upon Slavery itself of the resistance to its extension. The sentiments contained in that passage were deliberately uttered, and he held them now. If a decree of emancipation could abolish Slavery, John Brown would have done the work effectually. Such a decree surely could not be more binding upon the South than the Constitution, and that cannot be enforced in that part of the country now. Would a proclamation of freedom be any more effective?” Lincoln added “that he felt the magnitude of the task before him, and hoped to be rightly directed in the very trying circumstances by which he was surrounded.”

When a member of the delegation expressed “sympathy for him in all his embarrassments, and an earnest desire that he might, under divine guidance, be led to free

the slaves and thus save the nation from destruction,” he replied “that he was deeply sensible of his need of Divine assistance. He had sometime thought that perhaps he might be an instrument in God’s hands of accomplishing a great work and he certainly was not unwilling to be. Perhaps, however, God’s way of accomplishing the end which the memorialists have in view may be different from theirs. It would be his earnest endeavor, with a firm reliance upon the Divine arm, and seeking light from above, to do his duty in the place to which he had been called.”³²⁷

Lincoln also lost patience with an antislavery delegation from Connecticut, headed by the state’s governor, William A. Buckingham. The president “said abruptly, as if irritated by the subject: ‘Governor, I suppose that what your people want is more nigger.’” Buckingham was surprised both by his unwonted impatience and by his language. Lincoln quickly changed his tone and earnestly remarked “that if anybody supposed he was not interested in this subject, deeply interested, intensely anxious about it, it was a great mistake.”³²⁸

With gentle sarcasm Lincoln responded to a Chicago clergyman who claimed he was delivering the word of the Lord: “Open the doors of bondage that the slave may go free!” “That may be, sir,” said the president, “but if it is, as you say, a message from your Divine Master, is it not odd that the only channel he could send it by was that roundabout

³²⁷ Remarks made on 20 June 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:278-279; William D. Kelley to the editor of the New York Tribune, Philadelphia, 23 September 1885, in Kelley, Lincoln and Stanton, 83-85; Kelley in Allen Thorndike Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln by Distinguished Men of His Time (New York: North American Review, 1888), 281-283; Memorial of the Religious Society of Progressive Friends to Lincoln, 7 June 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; New York Journal of Commerce, n.d., copied in the National Anti-Slavery Standard (New York), 5 July 1862.

³²⁸ Samuel G. Buckingham, The Life of William A. Buckingham, the War Governor of Connecticut (Springfield: W. F. Adams, 1894), 262-63.

route by that awfully wicked city of Chicago?”³²⁹ To another presumptuous clergyman, Lincoln said: “Perhaps you had better try to run the machine a week.” (This was a tactic he used on laymen as well. He put down an impudent caller who was excoriating a government official. “Now,” said the president, “you are just the man I have been looking for. I want you to give me your address, and tell me, if you were in my place, and had heard all you’ve been telling, and didn’t believe a word of it, what would you do?”)³³⁰

The most dramatic and widely-circulated appeal for emancipation came from the pen of Horace Greeley, who had been growing ever more impatient with Lincoln. On August 7, that controversial editor asked Charles Sumner: “Do you remember that old theological book containing this: ‘Chapter One – Hell; Chapter Two – Hell Continued.’” Well, Greeley added, “that gives a hint of the way Old Abe ought to be talked to in this crisis.”³³¹ Understandably fearful that Greeley might publish something rash, former Secretary of the Treasury Robert J. Walker and journalist James R. Gilmore attempted to soothe him. Walker and Gilmore had learned that Lincoln would soon issue an emancipation decree and wished to inform the Tribune editor. (The president had uncharacteristically revealed his intention to several other people, among them Owen Lovejoy, Hannibal Hamlin, Orville H. Browning, James Speed, Leonard Swett, and Hiram Barney.)³³² Gilmore and Walker obtained Lincoln’s permission to do so, with the understanding that the paper would not leak the news. But it was too late. Gilmore spoke

³²⁹ Schuyler Colfax in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 334-35.

³³⁰ Albany Evening Journal, 30 June 1862.

³³¹ William Harlan Hale, Horace Greeley: Voice of the People (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), 269.

³³² Allen C. Guelzo, Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 126-31; James N. Adams, “Lincoln and Hiram Barney,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 50 (1957): 362-63; undated reminiscence by Barney, in Allan Nevins, ed., “Hiram Barney and Lincoln: Three Unpublished Documents,” Huntington Library Quarterly 26 (1962): 7-10; Barney to Gideon Welles, New York, 27 September 1877, Welles Papers, New York Public Library.

with Greeley on August 20, the very day that the Tribune ran the editor's "Prayer of Twenty Millions." The next day, in violation of the understanding Gilmore and Walker had reached with Lincoln, the paper ran a news item about the Emancipation Proclamation.³³³

"The Prayer of Twenty Millions" scolded the president, asserting that many of his early supporters were now "sorely disappointed and deeply pained" by his foot-dragging on emancipation. Greeley demanded that Lincoln enforce the Confiscation Acts, ignore the counsels of "fossil politicians hailing from the Border States," stop deferring to slaveholders, adopt some consistent policy with regard to slavery, and employ runaway bondsmen as "scouts, guides, spies, cooks, teamsters, diggers and choppers."³³⁴ Wendell Phillips applauded Greeley's handiwork as "superb" and "terrific."³³⁵ Moderates, however, condemned the editor's "impudence," his "insolence and dictatorial tone," along with his "arrogant" and "acrimonious" spirit.³³⁶ Greeley's letter, noted the Philadelphia Ledger, constituted "a severe lecture" written "in the style of a pedagogue dictating to a pupil."³³⁷ An Indiana editor likened Greeley to "a shrewish housekeeper" chastising "a careless servant."³³⁸

Lincoln responded swiftly with a letter that soon became famous. Tactfully he assured Greeley that he took no offense at what might be considered the editor's

³³³ Washington correspondence, 21 August, New York Tribune, 22 August 1862; James R. Gilmore, Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War (Boston: L.C. Page, 1898), 75-84.

³³⁴ New York Tribune, 20 August 1862.

³³⁵ Wendell Phillips to Sydney Howard Gay, n.p., 2 September 1862, Gay Papers, Columbia University.

³³⁶ Cincinnati Commercial, 25 August 1862; Washington National Intelligencer, n.d., quoted in the Washington correspondence, 23 August, New York Times, 24 August 1862.

³³⁷ Philadelphia Ledger, n.d., copied in the Washington Evening Star, 27 August 1862.

³³⁸ Indianapolis Journal, 25 August 1862.

“impatient and dictatorial tone,” nor would he controvert any seemingly erroneous “statements, or assumptions of fact” or false inferences in the editorial. Rather he would ignore them in “deference to an old friend, whose heart I have always supposed to be right.”

In dealing with the charge that he only seemed to have a policy dealing with slavery, the president tersely described the course he had been pursuing all along: “I would save the Union. I would save it the shortest way under the Constitution. The sooner the national authority can be restored; the nearer the Union will be ‘the Union as it was.’” (At this point, Lincoln included a sentence which he later struck out at the urging of the editors of the Washington National Intelligencer, in which the document first appeared: “Broken eggs can never be mended, and the longer the breaking proceeds the more will be broken.” By having his letter published in a Washington paper and by not forwarding it to Greeley, he let the truculent editor know that finger-wagging lectures were not appreciated.) “If there be those who would not save the Union, unless they could at the same time save slavery, I do not agree with them. If there be those who would not save the Union unless they could at the same time destroy slavery, I do not agree with them. My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union. I shall do less whenever I shall believe what I am doing hurts the cause, and I shall do more whenever I

shall believe doing more will help the cause. I shall try to correct errors when shown to be errors; and I shall adopt new views so fast as they shall appear to be true views. I have here stated my purpose according to my view of official duty; and I intend no modification of my oft-expressed personal wish that all men every where could be free.”³³⁹

By stating that he might free some slaves and leave others in bondage, Lincoln foreshadowed the proclamation that he would soon issue. In his final sentence, he made clear what anyone familiar with his speeches and actions in the 1850s already knew: that he hated slavery. Still, he emphasized that as a president bound by an oath, he could not ignore constitutional and political constraints.

Lincoln’s unprecedented public letter caused a sensation. “So novel a thing as a newspaper correspondence between the President and an editor excites great attention,” noted a journalist; but “Mr. Lincoln does so many original things that everybody has ceased to be surprised at him, and hence the violation of precedent in this matter does not provoke so much comment as might be expected.”³⁴⁰ A Washington correspondent noted that people “who insist on precedent, and Presidential dignity, are horrified at this novel idea of Mr. Lincoln’s, but there is unanimous admiration of the skill and force with which he has defined his policy.”³⁴¹ George Ashmun told Lincoln that the “first feeling of all your friends was, that it would be, to some extent, lessening the grave importance of your office, & the dignity with which you had performed all its functions. But an enlarged consideration of the surrounding circumstances, & the triumphant manner in which you

³³⁹ Lincoln to Greeley, Washington, 22 August 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:388-89; Welling in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 525n.

³⁴⁰ Washington correspondence, 24 August, Cincinnati Gazette, 25 August 1862.

³⁴¹ Washington correspondence, New York Times, 24 August 1862.

have so modestly & so clearly set forth the justification of your fixed purpose dispels all doubts of the expediency & wisdom of your course.”³⁴² The letter struck other moderate Republicans like ex-Governor William Dennison of Ohio and Supreme Court Justice Noah Swayne “as an advance step in the right direction – as a stronger official declaration of his determination to tread out the ‘institution’ if the Union can be no[t] otherwise preserved, than the President has yet given to the public.”³⁴³ Missouri Senator John B. Henderson assured Lincoln that the position spelled out in the letter “is the only one through which we can win for the Union. Emancipation proclamations can only serve to make things worse in the border states, without reaching the rebellious district.”³⁴⁴ The New York Times observed that Lincoln’s reply “exhibits the peculiarities of his mind and style; but the logical sequence and precision, and the grammatical accuracy of this, is greatly in advance of any previous effort.”³⁴⁵ Thurlow Weed, who had been very discouraged about the military situation, took “heart and hope” from the letter, which he said “clears the atmosphere, and gives ground to stand on. The ultras were . . . getting the Administration into false position. But it is all right now.”³⁴⁶ Senator Timothy O. Howe of Wisconsin deemed the letter “the best enunciation of the best platform we have had since the Chicago convention.”³⁴⁷ Lincoln’s reply, said the Indianapolis Journal, “is

³⁴² George Ashmun to Lincoln, Springfield, Massachusetts, 25 August 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

³⁴³ James W. White to Horace Greeley, Washington, 23 August 1862, Greeley Papers, Library of Congress.

³⁴⁴ John B. Henderson to Lincoln, Louisiana, Missouri, 3 September 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

³⁴⁵ New York Times in Harlan Hoyt Horner, Lincoln and Greeley (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1953), 275.

³⁴⁶ Thurlow Weed to William H. Seward, Albany, 23 August 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Leonard Swett to his wife Laura, New York, 10 August 1862, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

³⁴⁷ Howe to Lincoln, Green Bay, 25 August 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

admirable in temper, and takes the only ground he can take in regard to the bearing of the war upon slavery.”³⁴⁸

Greeley himself considered Lincoln’s response “a sign of progress,” as did Massachusetts Governor John A. Andrew, who said “hope rises of a vigorous, large, bold and hopeful policy.”³⁴⁹ Sydney Howard Gay wrote Lincoln: “your letter to Mr. Greeley has infused new hope among us at the North who are anxiously awaiting that movement on your part which they beleive [sic] will end the rebellion by removing its cause. I think the general impression is that as you are determined to save the Union tho' Slavery perish, you mean presently to announce that the destruction of Slavery is the price of our salvation.”³⁵⁰ There was good reason for such optimism. Lincoln told his friend Congressman Isaac N. Arnold “that the meaning of his letter to Mr. Greeley was this: that he was ready to declare emancipation when he was convinced that it could be made effective, and that the people were with him.”³⁵¹

Democrats too were impressed. A correspondent of Francis P. Blair told him that the president’s letter “meets with universal approbation. I have heard scores of Douglas Democrats declare that they would now support Lincoln for Dictator.”³⁵² In New York, former lieutenant-governor Sanford E. Church, a leading Democrat, thought “Lincoln has

³⁴⁸ Indianapolis Journal, 25 August 1862.

³⁴⁹ Horace Greeley to George W. Wright, 27 August 1862, Greeley Papers, Library of Congress; Guelzo, Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, 135.

³⁵⁰ Sydney H. Gay to Lincoln, [New York, August 1862], Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

³⁵¹ Adams S. Hill to Sydney Howard Gay, Washington, 1 September 1862, Gay Papers, Columbia University.

³⁵² Guelzo, Emancipation Proclamation, 136.

‘hit the nail on the head’ this time in his answer to Greeley. While it looks a little humiliating to answer it at all, the effect of the answer will be good.”³⁵³

Some abolitionists, like Owen Lovejoy and Gerrit Smith, praised Lincoln’s “excellent Letter.”³⁵⁴ Others agreed with Wendell Phillips, who condemned it as “cold, low, brutal” and “the most disgraceful document that ever came from the head of a free people.” Contemptuously Phillips remarked that Lincoln “can only be frightened or bullied into the right policy. . . . If the proclamation of Emanc[ipation] is possible at any time from Lincoln (which I somewhat doubt) it will be wrung from him only by fear. He’s a Spaniel by nature – nothing broad, generous, or highhearted about him.”³⁵⁵ Echoing Phillips, another abolitionist asked rhetorically: “Was ever a more heartless policy announced? . . . With the President public policy is everything, humanity and justice nothing.”³⁵⁶ Beriah Green indignantly denounced Lincoln’s willingness to leave slavery intact if the Union could be preserved without touching it. “What sort of a Union is Mr. Lincoln & his supporters & admirers fighting for?” he asked. Answering his own question, Green called the Union “the very sty of pollution – the very den of the grimmest oppression – the vestibule of Hell!”³⁵⁷ (Equally contemptuous of Lincoln’s letter to Greeley was a young conservative, Robert C. Winthrop, Jr., who found a “humiliating contrast between his state papers and those of [Jefferson] Davis, who can at

³⁵³ Sanford E. Church to Thurlow Weed, Albion, New York, 24 August 1862, Weed Papers, University of Rochester.

³⁵⁴ Gerrit Smith to Lincoln, Peterboro, New York, 9 October 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; speech of Lovejoy at Peoria, 13 September, Cincinnati Commercial, 22 September 1862.

³⁵⁵ Wendell Phillips to Sydney H. Gay, n.p., 2 September 1862, Sydney H. Gay Papers, Columbia University.

³⁵⁶ “J. S.” to William Lloyd Garrison, 1 September 1862, The Liberator (Boston) 5 September 1862, in James M. McPherson, The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 117.

³⁵⁷ Beriah Green to Gerrit Smith, Whitesboro, N.Y., 14 October 1862, Smith Papers, Syracuse University.

least write good English & express himself with dignity & firmness.” Winthrop admired the president’s honest intentions but deemed him “cruelly unfit for his place.”³⁵⁸

Less hostile abolitionists did not fear that Lincoln would fail to “reach the right conclusion” but rather “that he will reach it too late.”³⁵⁹ In Boston, Edmund Quincy thought that Lincoln’s stand was unsurprising, for the president had taken an oath to support the Constitution and therefore “is not expected to act upon motives of mere morality and humanity.”³⁶⁰ Frederick Douglass said that he would “prefer the Union even with Slavery than to allow the Slaveholders to go off and set up a Government.”³⁶¹ The president’s hint that he might save the Union by freeing all the slaves impressed the editors of the National Anti-Slavery Standard, who sensibly observed that he was constrained by the Constitution and therefore “is not to be expected to act upon motives of mere morality and humanity. In a certain political sense it may be said that he had no right to do so.”³⁶²

Lincoln’s letter has been misunderstood by those who view it as a definitive statement of his innermost feelings about the aims of the war. Some deplored its insensitivity to the moral significance of emancipation. In fact, the document was a political utterance designed to smooth the way for the proclamation which he intended to make public as soon as the Union army achieved a victory. He knew full well that millions of Northerners as well as Border State residents would object to transforming the

³⁵⁸ Robert C. Winthrop, Jr., to Robert C. Winthrop, Sr., Baden Baden, 11 September 1862, Winthrop Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

³⁵⁹ Washington correspondence, 24 August, New York Tribune, 25 August 1862.

³⁶⁰ National Antislavery Standard (New York), 30 August 1862.

³⁶¹ Douglass to Gerrit Smith, Rochester, 7 March 1863, Smith Papers, Syracuse University.

³⁶² National Anti-Slavery Standard (New York), 30 August 1862.

war into an abolitionist crusade. They were willing to fight to preserve the Union but not to free the slaves. As president, Lincoln had to make the mighty act of emancipation palatable to them. By assuring conservatives that emancipation was simply a means to preserve the Union, Lincoln hoped to minimize the white backlash that he knew would come. As he explained to General Lovell Harrison Rousseau and Kentucky Congressman Samuel L. Casey when they pressed for emancipation: “you are my friends – I can say and do what I please with you. But this other man I am in doubt about, yet it is important that I retain him in adhesion to our cause, so I go out of my way to please him, while I almost abuse you, who will stick by me, or the cause, come what will!”³⁶³

From the Border States and areas of the Confederacy now controlled by the Union Lincoln received many warnings about white backlash. Henry Winter Davis of Maryland (who would eventually become a Radical and help sabotage the president’s reconstruction efforts) argued that the “President can issue no decree of emancipation; if he could he would be my master & could take my home & imprison me at pleasure.”³⁶⁴ Most vocal in their opposition were Louisiana Unionists, including a prominent New Orleans attorney who told Lincoln: “we are in imminent danger of another revolution a thousand times more bloody than the present. If the agitations about slavery is not silenced, every man woman and child capable of using the knife or pistol will rush into the fight regardless of life or property, result will be that the stars and stripes will not wave over this city ninety days longer.”³⁶⁵

³⁶³ Washington correspondence, n.d., Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican, n.d., copied in the Providence Journal, 11 August 1862.

³⁶⁴ Henry Winter Davis to Samuel Francis Du Pont, [Baltimore], 11 July 1862, transcript, S. F. Du Pont Papers, Hagley Museum, Wilmington, Delaware.

³⁶⁵ Jacob Barker to Lincoln, New Orleans, 16 July 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

To a similar complaint from another New Orleans conservative, Thomas J. Durant (who, like Henry Winter Davis, would eventually become a Radical and help sabotage the president's reconstruction efforts), Lincoln replied heatedly to the friend who had forwarded Durant's letter. Calling Durant "an able, a dispassionate, and an entirely sincere man," Lincoln nonetheless criticized him and his allies for their passivity. "The paralysis – the dead palsy – of the government in this whole struggle is, that this class of men will do nothing for the government, nothing for themselves, except demanding that the government shall not strike its open enemies, lest they be struck by accident!" The president insisted that "what is done, and omitted, about slaves, is done and omitted on . . . military necessity. It is a military necessity to have men and money; and we can get neither, in sufficient numbers, or amounts, if we keep from, or drive from, our lines, slaves coming to them." Durant must be aware "of the pressure in this direction" and "of my efforts to hold it within bounds till he, and such as he shall have time to help themselves."

Durant and his ilk might have no unpatriotic motives, Lincoln argued, but "if there were a class of men who, having no choice of sides in the contest, were anxious only to have quiet and comfort for themselves while it rages, and to fall in with the victorious side at the end of it, without loss to themselves, their advice as to the mode of conducting the contest would be precisely such as his is. He speaks of no duty – apparently thinks of none – resting upon Union men. He even thinks it injurious to the Union cause that they should be restrained in trade and passage without taking sides. They are to touch neither a sail nor a pump, but to be merely passengers, – dead-heads at that – to be carried snug and dry, throughout the storm, and safely landed right side up.

Nay, more; even a mutineer is to go untouched lest these sacred passengers receive an accidental wound.”

Lincoln refused to smooth “the rough angles of the war.” The fighting would end only when the Rebels surrendered, and to achieve that end, stern measures must be taken. With some sarcasm, he asked Durant’s friend: “What would you do in my position? Would you drop the war where it is? . . . Would you deal lighter blows rather than heavier ones? Would you give up the contest, leaving any available means unapplied?” He closed this remarkable private letter with an eloquent disclaimer: “I am in no boastful mood. I shall not do more than I can, and I shall do all I can to save the government, which is my sworn duty as well as my personal inclination. I shall do nothing in malice. What I deal with is too vast for malicious dealing.”³⁶⁶ (Two years later the recipient of this missive called it one of Lincoln’s best.)³⁶⁷

Lincoln’s letter to Horace Greeley puzzled its recipient. “It is no answer to my ‘Prayer,’” the editor remarked. Indeed, the president had not addressed Greeley’s main complaint, viz., his failure to enforce the Confiscation Acts. Lincoln had apparently drafted the main body of the letter well before “The Prayer of Twenty Millions” appeared in print. According to Whitelaw Reid, “days before Greeley’s letter was published the President read to a friend a rough draft of what now appears in the form of a reply to Greeley and asked his advice about publishing it.”³⁶⁸

³⁶⁶ Lincoln to Cuthbert Bullitt, Washington, 28 July 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:344-46.

³⁶⁷ Cuthbert Bullitt to N.P. Banks, New Orleans, 23 September 1864, Banks Papers, Library of Congress.

³⁶⁸ Washington correspondence, 24 August, Cincinnati Gazette, 25 August 1862; Washington correspondence, 23 August, New York Times and New York Herald, 24 August 1862.

On August 23, in response to Orestes Brownson's argument that colonization would not work unless preceded by emancipation, Lincoln "said that he was not fully persuaded that it was yet time to proclaim Emancipation." When Brownson asked the president to specify just when he would emancipate the slaves, Lincoln referred him to the Greeley letter. Brownson prophetically inferred that "if the next battle in Virginia results in a decided victory," Lincoln would then issue a proclamation freeing the slaves in all the Confederate states save Virginia and Tennessee.³⁶⁹ (But Brownson had little faith in the president, for he thought that "nothing can be made of him, & no good can come of him.")³⁷⁰

The letter to Greeley offered a preview of coming events. It announced that Lincoln might free some slaves and leave others in bondage, which is just what his Emancipation Proclamation did.

In dealing with other emancipationists, Lincoln frequently played devil's advocate. As a New York Tribune correspondent observed, "it is one of the President's peculiarities – to some degree the result of his legal education – that he always looks at both sides of every question at once; and that, far from arguing with himself in favor of those views which are most in accordance with his desires, he rather runs into the opposite extreme of magnifying and attaching undue weight to the obstacles which appear in his course."³⁷¹ The best-publicized episode of this sort occurred on September 13, 1862, when a delegation of clergy from Chicago presented a memorial calling on him to liberate the slaves. He told his visitors that he had long given the subject much thought

³⁶⁹ Washington correspondence, 24 August, New York Tribune, 25 August 1862.

³⁷⁰ Brownson to Samuel G. Howe, Elizabeth, New Jersey, 13 September 1862, Schoff Civil War Collection, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

³⁷¹ Washington correspondence, 3 November, New York Tribune, 9 November 1862.

and had “no objections against it on legal or constitutional grounds; for, as commander-in-chief of the army and navy, in time of war, I suppose I have a right to take any measure which may best subdue the enemy. Nor do I urge objections of a moral nature, in view of possible consequences of insurrection and massacre at the South. I view the matter as a practical war measure, to be decided upon according to the advantages or disadvantages it may offer to the suppression of the rebellion.” The president said he was curious to know “[w]hat good would a proclamation of emancipation from me do, especially as we are now situated? I do not want to issue a document that the whole world will see must necessarily be inoperative, like the Pope's bull against the comet!”

Lincoln insisted that he lacked the power to free slaves in territory controlled by the Confederacy. “Would my word free the slaves,” asked he, “when I cannot even enforce the Constitution in the rebel States? Is there a single court, or magistrate, or individual that would be influenced by it there? And what reason is there to think it would have any greater effect upon the slaves than the late law of Congress, which I approved, and which offers protection and freedom to the slaves of rebel masters who come within our lines? Yet I cannot learn that that law has caused a single slave to come over to us.”

Even if slaves could be induced to flee to Union lines, Lincoln was perplexed to know “what should we do with them? How can we feed and care for such a multitude?” The blacks might, at least in theory, be accepted into the Union army, but Lincoln worried that they would be captured and re-enslaved. “I am told that whenever the rebels take any black prisoners, free or slave, they immediately auction them off! They did so with those they took from a boat that was aground in the Tennessee river a few days ago.

And then I am very ungenerously attacked for it! For instance, when, after the late battles at and near Bull Run, an expedition went out from Washington under a flag of truce to bury the dead and bring in the wounded, and the rebels seized the blacks who went along to help and sent them into slavery, Horace Greeley said in his paper that the Government would probably do nothing about it. What could I do?” Moreover, the president said he was “not so sure we could do much with the blacks. If we were to arm them, I fear that in a few weeks the arms would be in the hands of the rebels; and indeed thus far we have not had arms enough to equip our white troops.”

Lincoln agreed with his callers that “slavery is the root of the rebellion, or at least its sine qua non.” Secession may have been the work of ambitious politicians, “but they would have been impotent without slavery as their instrument.” He acknowledged “that emancipation would help us in Europe, and convince them that we are incited by something more than ambition.” As for domestic opinion, emancipation “would help somewhat at the North, though not so much, I fear, as you and those you represent imagine. Still, some additional strength would be added in that way to the war.”

The greatest practical advantage to be gained by freeing the slaves was that it would undermine the Confederate war effort, for “unquestionably it would weaken the rebels by drawing off their laborers, which is of great importance.” But that was offset by a grave disadvantage: “There are fifty thousand bayonets in the Union armies from the Border Slave States. It would be a serious matter if, in consequence of a proclamation such as you desire, they should go over to the rebels.”

Lincoln stressed that even without emancipation as a war aim, the conflict still had a great moral foundation around which the people easily rallied “in the fact that

constitutional government is at stake. This is a fundamental idea, going down about as deep as any thing.” Lest his callers draw a false inference from his remarks, Lincoln assured them that his questions merely “indicate the difficulties that have thus far prevented my action in some such way as you desire. I have not decided against a proclamation of liberty to the slaves, but hold the matter under advisement. And I can assure you that the subject is on my mind, by day and night, more than any other. Whatever shall appear to be God’s will I will do.”³⁷² At the close of the interview, he added that “there is a question of expediency as to time, should such a proclamation be issued. Matters look dark just now. I fear that a proclamation on the heels of defeat would be interpreted as a cry of despair. It would come better, if at all, immediately after a victory. I wish I could say something to you more entirely satisfactory.”³⁷³

Similarly, Lincoln told Leonard Swett that if he issued an emancipation proclamation, “50,000 troops, armed with our weapons, and in our service, in Kentucky and Tenn[essee], would in a body go over to the enemy.”³⁷⁴ He acknowledged to Swett that Robert Dale Owen had given him excellent arguments in favor of immediate emancipation, but the president added that while “all his sympathies were that way,” there were “a few things to be considered before venturing into the unknown result. Such negroes as had come through the lines were very poor and helpless, and at one place in

³⁷² Reply to Chicago clergymen, 13 September 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:419-25.

³⁷³ William W. Patton, President Lincoln and the Chicago Memorial on Emancipation: A Paper Read Before the Maryland Historical Society December 12th, 1887 (Baltimore: J. Murphy, 1888), 32.

³⁷⁴ Leonard Swett to his wife Laura, New York, 10 August 1862, David Davis Family Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

the neighborhood of the capital he had two regiments exclusively employed in feeding them. If emancipated, would the negro come? If he came, would he fight?”³⁷⁵

Lincoln asked for advice from some emancipation advocates. On September 11, he requested James A. Hamilton to draft a proclamation that he thought should be issued. Hamilton may have been flattered, but most abolitionists despaired. “I am growing more and more skeptical as to the ‘honesty’ of Lincoln,” William Lloyd Garrison snorted. “He is nothing better than a wet rag.”³⁷⁶ Frederick Douglass felt “ineffable disgust” as he contemplated the president’s course.³⁷⁷ The irascible Thaddeus Stevens wrote that it “is plain that nothing approaching the present policy will subdue the rebels. Whether we shall find any body with a sufficient grasp of mind, and sufficient moral courage, to treat this as a radical revolution, and remodel our institutions, I doubt. It would involve the desolation of the South as well as emancipation; and a re:peopling of half the Continent.”³⁷⁸ A Massachusetts editor sarcastically remarked, “Mr. Lincoln must worship a strange God indeed, if he imagines He is not in favor of universal freedom. The Bible Society, or some other benevolent institution ought at once to present him with a copy of the New Testament, with directions to peruse several chapters daily. Unless he indulged his usual hair-splitting propensity, he might derive great benefit.”³⁷⁹

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³⁷⁵ Speech by Swett, 26 April 1880, Chicago Times, 27 April 1880.

³⁷⁶ Garrison to Oliver Johnson, 9 September 1862, Merrill, ed., Garrison Letters, 5:112.

³⁷⁷ Douglass to Gerrit Smith, 8 September 1862, in McPherson, Struggle for Equality, 117.

³⁷⁸ Thaddeus Stevens to Simon Stevens, Lancaster, 5 September 1862, Palmer, ed., Stevens Papers, 1:323.

³⁷⁹ Northampton Free Press, n.d., copied in the Boston Commonwealth, 20 September 1862.

The despair of many abolitionists turned to joy in September when Lincoln seized upon the result of Antietam and announced his intention to issue the Emancipation Proclamation that had been languishing in his desk drawer for weeks. Though the fighting took place on Wednesday, September 17, three days passed before the president felt sure that it could be considered a Union victory. That weekend he tinkered with the Proclamation, which he presented to his cabinet on Monday the 22nd.

To New York attorney Edwards Pierrepont, he said: “It is my last trump card, Judge. If that don’t do, we must give up.”³⁸⁰ By playing it he said he hoped to “win the trick.”³⁸¹ On September 22, Lincoln explained his reasoning more fully to the cabinet. He began that memorable session by reading a humorous piece by Artemas Ward entitled “High-handed Outrage at Utica.” Everyone enjoyed the tale but Stanton, who thought it inappropriately frivolous for such a solemn occasion.

Lincoln then turned serious. According to Welles, he said that “he had made a vow, a covenant, that if God gave us the victory in the approaching battle, he would consider it an indication of Divine will, and that it was his duty to move forward in the cause of emancipation. It might be thought strange, he said, that he had in this way submitted the disposal of matter when the way was not clear to his mind what he should do. God had decided this question in favor of the slaves. He was satisfied it was right, was confirmed and strengthened in his action by the vow and the results.”³⁸² (Lincoln offered a similar explanation to a Massachusetts congressman: “When Lee came over the

³⁸⁰ Pierrepont told this to Maria Lydig Daly. Daly, Diary of a Union Lady, 1861-1865, ed. Harold Earl Hammond (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1962), 179 (entry for 28 September 1862).

³⁸¹ Edwards Pierrepont told this to Robert C. Winthrop. Robert C. Winthrop, Jr., A Memoir of Robert C. Winthrop (2nd ed., Boston: Little Brown, 1897), 229.

³⁸² Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:143 (entry for 22 September 1862).

river, I made a resolve that when McClellan drove him back – and I expected he would do it sometime or other – I would send the Proclamation after him.”)³⁸³

Chase recorded a somewhat different version of the president’s words that fateful twenty-second day of September: “I have, as you are aware, thought a great deal about the relation of this war to slavery; and you all remember that, several weeks ago, I read to you an Order I had prepared on this subject, which, on account of objections made by some of you, was not issued. Ever since then, my mind has been much occupied with this subject, and I have thought all along that the time for acting on it might very probably come. I think the time has come now. I wish it was a better time. I wish that we were in a better condition. The action of the army against the rebels has not been quite what I should have best liked. But they have been driven out of Maryland, and Pennsylvania is no longer in danger of invasion. When the rebel army was at Frederick, I determined, as soon as it should be driven out of Maryland, to issue a Proclamation of Emancipation such as I thought most likely to be useful. I said nothing to any one; but I made the promise to myself, and (hesitating a little)–to my Maker. The Rebel army is now driven out and I am going to fulfill that promise. I have got you together to hear what I have written down. I do not wish your advice about the main matter, for that I have determined for myself. This, I say without intending anything but respect for any one of you. But I already know the views of each on this question. They have been heretofore expressed, and I have considered them as thoroughly and as carefully as I can. What I have written is that which my reflections have determined me to say.”³⁸⁴ He asked for suggestions about

³⁸³ George Boutwell in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 126.

³⁸⁴ Niven, ed., Chase Papers, 1:393-94 (diary entry for 22 September 1862).

the form but not the content of the proclamation, a four-page document much longer than the brief one had had read to them two months earlier.

As the acknowledgement that he had made a promise to his maker indicated, Lincoln had been giving serious thought to his relationship with God. A month after issuing the Proclamation, he told the Quaker Eliza Gurney: “We are indeed going through a great trial – a fiery trial. In the very responsible position in which I happen to be placed, being a humble instrument in the hands of our Heavenly Father, as I am, and as we all are, to work out his great purposes, I have desired that all my works and acts may be according to his will, and that it might be so, I have sought his aid – but if after endeavoring to do my best in the light which he affords me, I find my efforts fail, I must believe that for some purpose unknown to me, He wills it otherwise. If I had had my way, this war would never have been commenced; If I had been allowed my way this war would have been ended before this, but we find it still continues; and we must believe that He permits it for some wise purpose of his own, mysterious and unknown to us; and though with our limited understandings we may not be able to comprehend it, yet we cannot but believe, that he who made the world still governs it.”³⁸⁵

One day when General Ethan Allen Hitchcock remarked to the president that he must “have a very trying position,” he replied simply and earnestly: “Yes, and did I not see the hand of God in the crisis – I could not sustain it.”³⁸⁶ Similarly he told a minister who expressed the hope that God was on the side of the Union that “it gave him no concern whether the Lord was on our side or not, for, he added 'I know the Lord is

³⁸⁵ Reply to Eliza P. Gurney, 26 October 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:478.

³⁸⁶ Elizabeth Peabody to Horace Mann, Jr., [mid Feb. 1865], in Arlin Turner, ed., "Elizabeth Peabody Visits Lincoln, February 1865," New England Quarterly 48 (March 1975):124.

always on the side of right,' and with deep feeling added, 'But God is my witness that it is my constant anxiety and prayer that both myself and this nation should be on the Lord's side.'"³⁸⁷ When Union fortunes were at a particularly low ebb, he said to a group of clergy and laymen: "Gentlemen, my hope of the success in this great and terrible struggle rests on that immutable foundation, the justice and goodness of God. And when events are very threatening, and prospects very dark, I still hope that in some way which man cannot see all will be well in the end, because our cause is just."³⁸⁸

To the cabinet, Lincoln modestly acknowledged that "many others might, in this matter, as in others, do better than I can; and if I was satisfied that the public confidence was more fully possessed by any one of them than by me, and knew of any Constitutional way in which he could be put in my place, he should have it. I would gladly yield it to him, but though I believe that I have not so much of the confidence of the people as I had some time since, I do not know that, all things considered, any other person has more; and, however this may be, there is no way in which I can have any other man put where I am. I am here. I must do the best I can, and bear the responsibility of taking the course which I feel I ought to take."³⁸⁹ (Two years later, Lincoln would remark that "it is very strange that I, a boy brought up in the woods, and seeing, as it were, but little of the world, should be drifted into the very apex of this great event.")³⁹⁰

³⁸⁷ Matthew Simpson, Funeral Address Delivered at the Burial of President Lincoln (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1865), 16.

³⁸⁸ Phineas D. Gurely's funeral oration for Lincoln, in B.F. Morris, ed., Memorial Record of the Nation's Tribute to Abraham Lincoln (Washington: W.H. & O.H. Morrison, 1865), 88.

³⁸⁹ Niven, ed., Chase Papers, 1:394 (diary entry for 22 September 1862).

³⁹⁰ Josiah Blackburn in the London, Ontario, Free Press, [19?] July 1864, copied in the New York Times, 1 August 1864.

Lincoln then read aloud his Proclamation, which was preliminary, for it would not officially go into effect until January 1. Like the Proclamation he had submitted to the cabinet in July, it called for voluntary colonization of the freedmen, endorsed his earlier gradual emancipation plan, and exempted both the Border States and some Confederate territory already occupied by the Union army. As Montgomery Blair remembered, the president stated that “he had power to issue the proclamation only in virtue of his power to strike at the rebellion, and he could not include places within our own lines, because the reason upon which the power depended did not apply to them, and he could not include such places” merely because he personally opposed slavery.³⁹¹ Confederate slaveholders would have one hundred days in which to cease rebelling; if they would lay down their arms, they could keep their chattels. If they did not, then as of New Year’s Day, their slaves “shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free.” Wherever the Union army penetrated, it would rigorously enforce the Proclamation. The attorney general, not any commander in the field, was to determine which slave owners were loyal.

This exemption of areas under Union control (where 800,000 slaves lived) caused some to scoff that the emancipation proclamation freed no one, for it would apply only to areas where the Union lacked the power to enforce it. But in fact tens of thousands of slaves in Union-occupied Arkansas, Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida were liberated on January 1 by the Proclamation.³⁹² And hundreds of thousands more would be freed as federal armies penetrated ever deeper into the Confederacy.

³⁹¹ Guelzo, Emancipation Proclamation, 173, citing Montgomery Blair, The Republican Party As It Was and Is, 426.

³⁹² William C. Harris, “After the Emancipation Proclamation: Lincoln’s Role in the Ending of Slavery,” North and South 5 (December 2001): 45.

A striking new feature of the Proclamation was its hint that the administration would aid slave insurrections: “The executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize the freedom of such persons [freed slaves], and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom.” Lincoln doubtless meant that the Union army would not return runaways to bondage, though many would interpret his words to mean that the North would incite slave uprisings. Also noteworthy was the Proclamation’s pledge that “all citizens of the United States who shall have remained loyal thereto throughout the rebellion, shall . . . be compensated for all losses by acts of the United States, including the loss of slaves.” Lincoln was promising to compensate loyal slaveholders without congressional authorization!

After Lincoln finished reading the text, Seward suggested that it would be better to promise to “recognize and maintain the freedom” of the slaves rather than merely to “recognize” it. The secretary of state also objected that the document as written implied that emancipation would only be valid as long as Lincoln remained president (“the executive government of the United States will, during the continuance in office of the present incumbent, recognize such persons, as being free.”) Lincoln took Seward’s advice, adding “and maintain” and deleting the reference to “continuance in office of the present incumbent.”

While expressing some reservations about the Proclamation, which “was going a step further than he had ever proposed,” Chase nevertheless pledged to “take it just as it is written, and to stand by it with all my heart.” Stanton and Welles voiced strong approval, but Bates and Blair objected to the document’s timing. The postmaster general,

a strong emancipationist, feared that the Border States might be driven to secede. Lincoln acknowledged the validity of such criticism but replied that “the difficulty was as great not to act as to act. There were two sides to that question. For months he had labored to get those [Border] States to move in this matter, convinced in his own mind that it was their true interest to do so, but his labors were in vain. . . . They would acquiesce, if not immediately, soon; for they must be satisfied that slavery had received its death-blow from slave-owners – it could not survive the rebellion.” Blair also protested that the proclamation put into the hands of Northern Democrats “a club to be used against us.” Lincoln said that argument “had not much weight with him” for “their clubs would be used against us take what course we might.”³⁹³

The next day Blair elaborated on his argument, maintaining that there was “no public sentiment at the North, even among extreme men which now demands the proposed measure.” The Proclamation would “endanger our power in Congress, and put the power in the next House of Representatives in the hands of those opposed to the war, or to our mode of carrying it on.”³⁹⁴ Echoing Blair, a Republican leader in southern Ohio predicted that the Proclamation “will defeat me and every other Union candidate for Congress along the border.”³⁹⁵

The “rheumatic and stiff-jointed” language of the Proclamation disappointed some Radicals.³⁹⁶ “How cold the President’s Proclamation is,” the abolitionist lecturer Sallie Holley remarked; it was “graceless coming from a sinner at the head of a nation of

³⁹³ Niven, ed., Chase Papers, 1:394-95 (diary entry for 22 September 1862).

³⁹⁴ Blair to Lincoln, 23 September 1862, draft, Blair Papers, Library of Congress.

³⁹⁵ Hezekiah S. Bundy to Chase, Reed’s Mill, 3 October 1862, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

³⁹⁶ Theodore Tilton to Garrison, New York, 24 September 1862, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

sinner.”³⁹⁷ Adam Gurowski called it an “illogical, pusillanimous, confused half-measure,” written “in the meanest and the most dry routine style,” without “a word to evoke a generous thrill, not a word reflecting the warm and lofty comprehension and feelings of the immense majority of the people on this question of emancipation. Nothing for humanity . . . it is clear that the writer was not in it either with his heart or his soul; it is clear it was done under moral duress, under the throttling pressure of events.”³⁹⁸

Frederick Douglass lamented that the words of the Proclamation “touched neither justice nor mercy. Had there been one expression of sound moral feeling against Slavery, one word of regret and shame that this accursed system had remained so long the disgrace and scandal of the Republic, one word of satisfaction in the hope of burying slavery and the rebellion in one common grave, a thrill of joy would have run around the world.”³⁹⁹

Indignantly, Beriah Green asked: “How in his Proclamation . . . does Mr. L. regard the horribly outraged – the damnably oppressed men & women & children, who in this country are blasphemously called slaves? Other at all than as a fulcrum, by wh. he tries to pry the Confederate States into his Union?”⁴⁰⁰ The fiery Parker Pillsbury thought “God has no better opinion of our President than he had of Pharaoh.” Pillsbury longed for the day when “somebody calls for justice” and talks “of something besides ‘Compensation & Colonisation’” and acts “from higher considerations than ‘Military Necessity.’”⁴⁰¹ Though Lydia Maria Child was grateful for the Proclamation, nonetheless she told a friend: “The

³⁹⁷ Sallie Holley to Abby Kelley, 30 September 1862, in Dorothy Sterling, Ahead of Her Time: Abby Kelley and the Politics of Anti-Slavery (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), 336.

³⁹⁸ Adam Gurowski, Diary (3 vols.; Boston, 1862-1866), 1:278 (entry for 23 September 1862).

³⁹⁹ Douglass’s Monthly, January 1863.

⁴⁰⁰ Beriah Green to Gerrit Smith, Whitesboro, N.Y., 14 October 1862, Smith Papers, Syracuse University.

⁴⁰¹ Parker Pillsbury to Theodore Tilton, Boston, 12 December 1862, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, New-York Historical Society.

ugly fact cannot be concealed that it was done reluctantly and stintedly, and that even the degree that was accomplished was done selfishly; was merely a war-measure, to which we were forced by our own perils and necessities; and that no recognition of principles of justice or humanity surrounded the politic act with a halo of moral glory.”⁴⁰²

Lincoln carefully omitted any moral appeal in order to avoid antagonizing conservative opinion, especially in the Lower North and the Border States. He also wished to make sure that slaves liberated under the proclamation had a sound legal basis to protect their freedom in court, if necessary. Months later, when the Final Emancipation Proclamation was about to be issued, Lincoln told a journalist that he was “strongly pressed” to justify it “upon high moral grounds, and to introduce into the instrument unequivocal language testifying to the negroes’ right to freedom upon the precise principles expounded by the Emancipationists of both Old and New-England.” The president resisted this advice, for “policy requires that the Proclamation be issued as a war measure, and not a measure of morality; and that Law and Justice require that the slaves should be enabled to plead the Proclamation hereafter if necessary to establish judicially their title to freedom. They can do this, the President says, on a proclamation proceeding as a war measure from the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, but not on one issuing from the bosom of philanthropy.”⁴⁰³

John Murray Forbes defended Lincoln’s emphasis on military necessity. That influential Massachusetts industrialist and philanthropist told Charles Sumner that “our strongest Republicans some even of Mr Lincoln Electors have constitutional scruples in

⁴⁰² Lydia Child to Sarah Shaw, Wayland, 30 October 1862, Lydia Maria Child: Selected Letters, 1817-1880, ed. Milton Meltzer and Patricia G. Holland (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), 419.

⁴⁰³ Washington correspondence, 29 December, New York Tribune, 30 December 1862.

regard to emancipation upon any other ground – & with these must be joined a large class of Democrats & self styled ‘Conservatives’ whose support is highly desirable – and ought to be secured where it can be done without any sacrifice of principle.” Forbes realized that Sumner and his allies “would like to have it done upon higher ground but the main thing is to have it done strongly & to have it so backed up by public opinion that it will strike the telling blow at the Rebellion and at slavery together.” Resorting to a nutritional metaphor to make his case, Forbes added: “I buy and eat my bread made from the flour raised by the hard working Farmer – it is certainly satisfactory that in so doing I am helping the Farmer clothe his children but my motive is self preservation – not philanthropy nor justice. Let the President free the slaves upon the same principle & so state it that the masses of our people can easily understand it. He will thus remove constitutional scruples from some and will draw to himself the support of a very large class – who do not want to expend their Brothers & Sons and money for the benefit of the Negro, but who will be very glad to see Northern life and treasure saved by any practical measure – even if it does incidentally an act of justice and benevolence.” Forbes did not wish to “disclaim the higher motives but where so much prejudice exists – I would eat my bread to sustain my life– I would take the one short sure method of preserving the national life – & say little about any other motive.”⁴⁰⁴

Radicals objected to the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation on more than stylistic grounds. Though William Lloyd Garrison publicly called its issuance a “matter for great rejoicing,” an “important step in the right direction,” and “an act of immense historic consequence,” he objected to its limited scope, its contradictory “jumble of

⁴⁰⁴ John M. Forbes to Charles Sumner, Boston, 27 December 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

words,” and “its mean, absurd and proscriptive device to expatriate the colored population.”⁴⁰⁵ Privately he remarked that Lincoln “can do nothing for freedom in a direct manner, but only by circumlocution and delay.”⁴⁰⁶ The Rev. Dr. George B. Cheever of New York detected in the Proclamation no “justice, nobleness, or humanity” but rather “the most unreserved national selfishness.”⁴⁰⁷ To him it seemed “a measure of mere political expediency” and little more than “a bribe to win back the slaveholding States to loyalty by giving and confirming to them the privilege of tyrannizing over millions of their fellow creatures in perpetual slavery. . . . So stupendous a bribe, so truly hellish in its nature, never before was imagined.” Lincoln was, Cheever scornfully remarked, “nothing but a nose of wax,” and abolitionists “had as good a right to pull that nose as Kentucky.”⁴⁰⁸ In scolding Lincoln, he urged that the Proclamation be made to apply to all slaves unconditionally.⁴⁰⁹

But many other Radicals agreed with Massachusetts Governor John A. Andrew’s conclusion that it was “a mighty act” though a “poor document,” “slow, somewhat halting, wrong in its delay till January, but great and sublime after all.”⁴¹⁰ The firebrand Samuel J. May, Jr., wished that the emancipation had been immediate and had come much earlier, but he confessed that “I cannot stop to dwell on these. Joy, gratitude,

⁴⁰⁵ The Liberator (Boston), 26 September 1862, copied in the Cincinnati Commercial, 3 October 1862.

⁴⁰⁶ Garrison to Fanny Garrison, Boston, 25 September 1862, Merrill, ed., Garrison Letters, 5:114-15.

⁴⁰⁷ New York Herald, 6 October 1862.

⁴⁰⁸ George B. Cheever to his sister Elizabeth Washburn, New York, 29 September 1862, Cheever Family Papers, American Antiquarian Society.

⁴⁰⁹ George B. Cheever to Lincoln, New York, 22 November 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴¹⁰ Andrew to Albert G. Brown, Jr., 23 September 1862, in Henry Greenleaf Pearson, The Life of John A. Andrew, Governor of Massachusetts, 1861-1865 (2 vols.; Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1904), 2:51.

thanksgiving, renewed hope and courage fill my soul.”⁴¹¹ The National Anti-Slavery Standard rejoiced “with an unspeakable joy.”⁴¹² Theodore Tilton laughed and cried “in a bewilderment of joy” and was “half crazy with enthusiasm!”⁴¹³ The abolitionist Boston Commonwealth relished the way that Lincoln turned the tables on critics who insisted that the war be fought solely to preserve the Union. The editor remarked to such carpers: “We complained bitterly that the President was slow; but now we see that his slowness has been the means of committing the whole flock of you to a rule of loyalty, which you cannot abandon without making it appear that in all your previous course you were liars and hypocrites. . . . Those who do not stand by the Proclamation will be branded as those who would rather see the United States Government overthrown than the end of Human Bondage on this continent.”⁴¹⁴

“We shout for joy that we live to record this righteous decree,” wrote Frederick Douglass. The president might be slow, but Douglass was sure that he was “not the man to reconsider, retract and contradict words and purposes solemnly proclaimed over his official signature.”⁴¹⁵ Other blacks were equally enthusiastic. The editor of the New York Anglo-African said “joy sits enthroned upon our heart,” for Lincoln’s proclamation was “a bridge of gold” and “a glorious harbinger of the future.”⁴¹⁶

⁴¹¹ May to Richard Webb, 23 September 1862, in McPherson, Struggle for Equality, 119.

⁴¹² National Anti-Slavery Standard (New York), 27 September 1862.

⁴¹³ Thodore Tilton to Garrison, New York, 24 September 1862, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

⁴¹⁴ Boston Commonwealth, 4 October 1862.

⁴¹⁵ Douglass’s Monthly, October 1862, 721.

⁴¹⁶ Weekly Anglo-African (New York), n.d., copied in the Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 9 October 1862, and in the National Anti-Slavery Standard (New York), 4 October 1862.

To Charles Sumner the “skies are brighter and the air is purer, now that slavery has been handed over to judgment.”⁴¹⁷ Hannibal Hamlin told the president that the proclamation “will stand as the great act of the age. It will prove to be wise in Statesmanship, as it is Patriotic. It will be enthusiastically approved and sustained. . . . God bless you for the great and noble act.”⁴¹⁸ Horace Greeley called the issuance of the Proclamation the “beginning of the end of the rebellion,” the “beginning of a new life for the nation,” and “one of those stupendous facts in human history which marks not only an era in the progress of the nation, but an epoch in the history of the world.” That cantankerous editor, who had scolded the president a month earlier in “The Prayer of Twenty Millions,” now said: “God bless Abraham Lincoln.” Extravagantly Greeley’s paper announced: “Let the President know that everywhere throughout all the land he is hailed as Wisest and Best, and that by this great deed of enfranchisement of an oppressed people – a deed, the doing of whereof was never before vouchsafed to any mortal ruler – he re-creates a nation.”⁴¹⁹

Others heaped similar praise on the document. John W. Forney called it a “second Declaration of Independence.”⁴²⁰ The Pittsburgh Gazette editorialized that the Proclamation was “the most important document in the world’s history. Magna Charta is as nothing to it. It is, in fact, a new Magna Charta, before the light of which the other must pale.”⁴²¹ The New York Evening Post deemed it “the most solemn and momentous declaration that world ever witnessed,” which “puts us right before Europe,” “brings us

⁴¹⁷ The Works of Charles Sumner (15 vols.; Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1870-83), 7:199.

⁴¹⁸ Hannibal Hamlin to Lincoln, Bangor, Maine, 25 September 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴¹⁹ New York Tribune, 24 September 1862.

⁴²⁰ Washington correspondence by Forney, 23 September, Philadelphia Press, 24 September 1862.

⁴²¹ Pittsburgh Gazette, 24 September 1862.

back to our traditions,” and “animates our soldiers with the same spirit which led our forefathers to victory under Washington.”⁴²² More moderately the New York Times said it was “one of the great events of the century.”⁴²³ Lincoln’s hometown paper, the Illinois State Journal, grandly asserted that “no event in the history of this country since the Declaration of Independence itself has excited so profound attention either at home or abroad.”⁴²⁴ The Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican sensibly commented that Lincoln’s “action is timely – neither too soon nor too late. . . . it will be sustained by the great mass of the loyal people, North and South, and thus by the courage and prudence of the president the greatest social and political revolution of the age will be triumphantly carried through in the midst of a civil war.”⁴²⁵

The Proclamation warmed the hearts of leading New England intellectuals. A former critic of the administration, Ralph Waldo Emerson, changed his tune after the announcement of the Proclamation. In The Atlantic Monthly he ranked it with such milestones in the history of liberty as “the Augsburg Confession, the plantation of America, the English Commonwealth of 1648, the Declaration of American Independence in 1776, the British emancipation of slaves in the West Indies, the passage of the Reform Bill, the repeal of the Corn Laws, the Magnetic Ocean Telegraph,” and the enactment of the homestead bill by Congress earlier in 1862. Lincoln, said the Sage of Concord, “has been permitted to do more for America than any other American man.” The nation was redeemed, he declared: “With this blot removed from our national honor,

⁴²² New York Evening Post, n.d., copied in Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 24 September 1862; Allan Nevins, The Evening Post: A Century of Journalism (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922), 295.

⁴²³ New York Times, 28 September 1862.

⁴²⁴ Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 24 September 1862.

⁴²⁵ Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 24 September 1862.

this heavy load lifted off the national heart, we shall not fear henceforward to show our faces among mankind. We shall cease to be hypocrites and pretenders but what we have styled our free institutions will be such.”⁴²⁶ James Russell Lowell expressed delight that the administration had finally taken a stand “on the side of freedom, justice, and sound policy.”⁴²⁷ The abolitionist and transcendentalist William Henry Furness expected that the Proclamation would open a "new world" which was "coming into existence arrayed in millennial splendor, wherein the distinctions of race, which have always been such active causes of contempt and hatred and war shall be obliterated, and men shall live together in the relations of a Christian brotherhood.”⁴²⁸

“God be praised!” exclaimed Charles Eliot Norton to George William Curtis. “I can hardly see to write, – for when I think of this great act of Freedom, and all it implies, my heart and my eyes overflow with the deepest, most serious gladness.”⁴²⁹ Curtis declared that there “was a time, not very long since, when a large majority of the Northern people would have opposed it strenuously, not so much from admiration of slavery, as from the belief that, under the Constitution, we had no right to meddle with it, and that its abolition involved dangers and inconveniences perhaps as formidable as those that were created by its existence.” But educated men had been radicalized and the working class was sure to follow.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁶ Emerson, “The President’s Proclamation,” The Atlantic Monthly, November 1862, 640.

⁴²⁷ The Writings of James Russell Lowell (10 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1890), 8:301.

⁴²⁸ William Henry Furness, “A Word of Consolation for the Kindred of Those Who Have Fallen in Battle, A Discourse of September 28, 1862” (n.d., n.p.), 7, 13, quoted in George M. Fredrickson, The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), 118.

⁴²⁹ Charles Eliot Norton to George W. Curtis, Shady Hill, Massachusetts, 23 September 1862, in Sara Norton and M. A. De Wolfe Howe, eds., Letters of Charles Eliot Norton (2 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), 1:256.

⁴³⁰ Harper’s Weekly (4 October 1862).

Not all Republicans in New England were so enthusiastic about the Proclamation. Privately Richard Henry Dana feared that “it is to be a dead failure,” for unless the Union army won a decisive victory before New Years, “the war ends, Abolitionism ends, the Cotton States, at least, are independent, slavery is not disturbed, & Pres. Lincoln & all who are responsible (civilly) for the conduct of the war, go to the well.”⁴³¹

More than a dozen Northern governors who had gathered in Altoona, Pennsylvania, also congratulated the president. Their original purpose in coming together had been to discuss the grave military situation as Lee invaded the North and to urge a more vigorous prosecution of the war.⁴³² On September 6, Andrew G. Curtin of Pennsylvania asked some of his counterparts if it would not “be well that the loyal governors should meet at some point in the border states to take measures for the more active support of the government?”⁴³³ Especially enthusiastic in promoting the conclave was Massachusetts Governor John A. Andrew, who argued that something must be done “to save the Presdt. from the infamy of ruining his country.”⁴³⁴ He favored replacing McClellan with Frémont. Other Radical governors, notably Richard Yates of Illinois,

⁴³¹ Richard Henry Dana to “Dear Sally” and to his father, [Boston?], 1 October 1862, Richard Henry Dana Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁴³² Hesseltine, Lincoln and the War Governors, 253-62; Rebecca Gifford Albright, “The Civil War Career of Andrew Gregg Curtin,” Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine 48 (1965): 19-28; Samuel J. Kirkwood, “The Loyal Governors at Altoona in 1862,” letter to the editor, Iowa City, 20 December 1891, Iowa Historical Record (1892), 210-14; John Russell Young, “Curtin and the Altoona Conference” in William H. Egle ed., Andrew Gregg Curtin: His Life and Services (Philadelphia: Avil, 1895): 318-20; Washington correspondence, 24, 26 September, New York Tribune 25, 27 September 1862; Washington correspondence, 26 September, New York Herald, 27 September 1862; New York Times, 3 October 1862.

⁴³³ John Michael Hamrouge, “John A. Andrew, Abolitionist Governor, 1861-1865” (Ph.D. dissertation, Fordham University, 1974), 159.

⁴³⁴ Andrew to Adam Gurowski, [Boston], 6 September 1862, letterpress copy, Andrew Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

insisted that Lincoln must be goaded to take vigorous action against slavery.⁴³⁵ But on September 14, moderate governors (Curtin, David Tod, and Francis H. Pierpont) rather than Radicals issued the call for the Altoona conclave.

After receiving a letter from Michigan Senator Zachariah Chandler stating that “nothing will save us but a demand of the loyal governors, backed by a threat – that a change of policy and men shall instantly be made,” Lyman Trumbull warned Yates and his colleagues against dictating policy to the president. Such a step would violate the spirit of the Constitution, he argued. Moreover, Trumbull said with uncharacteristic charity for Lincoln, none of the governors, though “men of great ability and far-seeing comprehension,” was as capable as the president. “I know of no governor in any state who I believe equal in ability to Mr. Lincoln, and in high moral integrity – besides he has in his councils as great men as the Republic can produce. With this combination of talent and experience, I feel that our cause is doing the best it can under the circumstances.”⁴³⁶

Before the Altoona meeting, Curtin, Andrew, and Ohio Governor David Tod called on the president, who advised them to expect a new pronouncement on slavery. Lincoln also said that he approved of the gathering and received assurances that the governors would support the forthcoming change in policy.⁴³⁷

The mood at the Altoona meeting was soothed by the quasi-victory at Antietam a week earlier. Despite the outcome of that battle, some of the thirteen governors criticized McClellan, most notably Samuel J. Kirkwood of Iowa, who said Little Mac “had done

⁴³⁵ Richard Yates and Catharine Yates Pickering, Richard Yates, Civil War Governor, ed. John H. Krenkel (Danville, Ill.: Interstate Printers, 1966), 173-80.

⁴³⁶ Trumbull to Yates, Beardstown, Illinois, 19 September 1862, L. U. Reavis Papers, Chicago History Museum.

⁴³⁷ Curtin to Alexander K. McClure, n.p., 16 February 1892, in Alexander K. McClure, Abraham Lincoln and Men of War-Times (Philadelphia: Times, 1892), 270-72.

wrong in allowing bad men and bad newspapers, who were sympathizers with the Rebels, and were doing all in their power to help the rebellion to success, to be his peculiar champions, although he knew that ten words from his lips would send them to hell, where they belong.”⁴³⁸ Ohio’s Governor Tod defended the Young Napoleon, as did Curtin and Maryland Governor Augustus Bradford. Half a dozen governors expressed indignation that Frèmont had been offered no command since his petulant resignation that summer. All save Bradford approved of the Emancipation Proclamation. Curtin and John A. Andrew drew up an address expressing “heartfelt gratitude and encouraged hope” to Lincoln for that momentous document, which they predicted would inspire “new vigor” as well as “new life and hope” among their constituents. They also urged that 100,000 reserve troops be organized to respond to future emergencies like the recent Confederate incursion across the Potomac.

In reply, the president invited them to the White House and gratefully declared that “no fact had assured him so thoroughly of the justice of the conclusion at which he had arrived as that the Executives of loyal States gave it their hearty approbation.”⁴³⁹ The “kind, polite, and conciliatory” tone of the meeting was disturbed briefly when Kirkwood said that the people of Iowa thought that McClellan “was unfit to command his army, that his army was well clothed, well armed, well disciplined,” that his troops “were fighting in a cause as good as men ever fought for, and fought as bravely as men ever fought, yet were continually whipped.” Brashly he added: “There is an impression out west, Mr. President, that you do not dare to remove McClellan.” Stung by this remark, Lincoln

⁴³⁸ Dan Elbert Clark, Samuel Jordan Kirkwood (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1917), 249.

⁴³⁹ Reply to loyal governors, 26 September 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:441.

replied: “if I believed our cause would be benefited by removing Gen. McClellan to-morrow, I would remove him to-morrow. I do not so believe to-day, but if the time shall come when I shall so believe I will remove him promptly, and not till then.”⁴⁴⁰

Several governors at Altoona had criticized cabinet members, but it was decided not to raise that delicate subject with Lincoln at their White House meeting. Instead, Andrew, Tod, and Pierpont were to speak to him individually.

Democrats called the Altoona Conference a “second Hartford Convention” and claimed that the governors’ pressure had forced Lincoln to preempt them by issuing the Emancipation Proclamation.⁴⁴¹ He denied it, insisting to George Boutwell that “I never thought of the meeting of the governors” when deciding to issue the Proclamation.⁴⁴²

On September 24, Lincoln “with great grace and dignity” also expressed gratitude to a group of serenaders who called at Executive Mansion.⁴⁴³ Whitelaw Reid reported that the crowd, which was “honoring the great act that shall make Abraham Lincoln immortal among men,” cheered repeatedly, surged back and forth, and looked on the man whom “the people trust” with “a thousand expressions – delight, gratification, curiosity, rage.” When the cheering subsided, he explained “not triumphantly – hardly confidently” that “[w]hat I did, I did after very full deliberation, and under a very heavy and solemn sense of responsibility. [Cries of “Good,” “Good,” “Bless you,” and applause.]” He added “reverently and humbly” that “I can only trust in God I have made no mistake. [Cries “No mistake – all right; you’ve made no mistakes yet. Go ahead, you’re right.”] I shall

⁴⁴⁰ Washington correspondence, 26 September 1862, Philadelphia Inquirer, 27 September 1862; Kirkwood, “Loyal Governors at Altoona,” 213-14.

⁴⁴¹ Hamrogue, “Andrew,” 170.

⁴⁴² Boutwell in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 400.

⁴⁴³ Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 41 (entry for 24 September 1862).

make no attempt on this occasion to sustain what I have done or said by any comment. [Voices – “That’s unnecessary; we understand it.”] It is now for the country and the world to pass judgment on it, and, maybe, take action upon it.” Reid thought the scene “well worth remembering – one that History will treasure up forever: the President of a great Republic . . . standing at his window, amid the clouds and gloom with which his decree of Universal Emancipation is ushered in, receiving the congratulations of his People for his bold word for Freedom and the Right, . . . hesitating as he thanks them, doubting even amid the ringing cheers of the populace, trusting in God he has made no mistake, tremulously (so tremulously that his utterance seems choked by his agitation) awaiting the judgment of the Country and the World.”⁴⁴⁴

That judgment was not entirely positive. Some sneered at the Proclamation as an “inopportune paper weapon.”⁴⁴⁵ Even a sympathetic observer like George Templeton Strong predicted that it “will do us good abroad, but will have no other effect.”⁴⁴⁶ The Washington National Intelligencer spoke for many when it scornfully referred to “the inutility of such proclamations” and predicted that Lincoln’s might do more harm than good.⁴⁴⁷ The New York Herald argued that Lincoln thought the war would be over by year’s end and that the document was therefore a mere sop “to silence the clamors of our shrieking and howling abolition faction” and could not “in any just sense be regarded as

⁴⁴⁴ Washington correspondence by Agate, 25 September 1862, Smart, ed., Agate Dispatches, 1:234-236; Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:438.

⁴⁴⁵ Washington correspondence, 26 September, New York Evening Express, 27 September 1862; New York Evening Express, n.d., copied in the Cincinnati Commercial, 30 September 1862.

⁴⁴⁶ Nevins and Thomas, eds., Strong Diary, 3:262 (entry for 27 September 1862).

⁴⁴⁷ Washington National Intelligencer, 23 September 1862.

an emancipation or abolition measure. It is wholly conditional, and may never emancipate a single slave.”⁴⁴⁸

Democratic papers called the Proclamation “a nullity,” a “monstrous usurpation,” a “criminal wrong,” and an “act of national suicide” that would “excite the ridicule that follows impotency.”⁴⁴⁹ The New York Express protested that the human mind “never conceived a policy so well fitted, utterly to degrade and destroy while labor, and to reduce the white man to the level of the negro.”⁴⁵⁰

Reaction in the Border States was predictably negative. The “mischievous, pestilent proclamation” reportedly “produced great despondency” in Kentucky.⁴⁵¹ The Louisville Democrat objected that “the President has as much right to abolish the institution of marriage, or the laws of a State regulating the relation of parent and child, as to nullify the right of a State to regulate the relations of the white and black races.”⁴⁵² The Louisville Journal decried the proclamation as “wholly unauthorized and wholly pernicious” and predicted that “Kentucky cannot and will not acquiesce in this measure. Never!”⁴⁵³ A Kentuckian warned Lincoln that if “Negroes be freed in any of the Southern States, which are in rebellion, they will at once, make their way to the loyal or ‘border States,’ and there become a pest to Society, an expense upon the public or be driven beyond the bounds by the bayonet, or exterminated in like manner as we Christians have

⁴⁴⁸ New York Herald, 24, 27, 29 September 1862.

⁴⁴⁹ Chicago Times, 24 September 1862; Boston Post, n.d., copied in the Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 24 September 1862.

⁴⁵⁰ New York Evening Express, 23 September 1862.

⁴⁵¹ E. T. Bainbridge to Joseph Holt, Louisville, 29 September 1862, Holt Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁵² Louisville Democrat, 24 September 1862, copied in the New York Herald, 29 September 1862; Louisville Democrat, n.d., copied in the Cincinnati Commercial, 27 September 1862.

⁴⁵³ Louisville Journal, n.d., copied in Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 2 October 1862.

‘done unto’ the Indians.”⁴⁵⁴ In Missouri the news was “received with serious head shakings by many.”⁴⁵⁵ A St. Louis admirer of the president appealed to Joseph Holt: “Stop him! Hold him!” Could Holt “not prevail on him to be entirely silent on ‘negro-ology’?” Lincoln’s “proclamations have paralyzed our armies; and given nerve & vigor to the rebels.”⁴⁵⁶ In western Virginia, the Wheeling Press engaged in hyperbole, arguing that the Proclamation was “more like the knell of freedom and the wail of the departing angel of peace” than any document since the revocation of the edict of Nantes in 1685, which led to the persecution of French Protestants.⁴⁵⁷

In response to such criticism, Whitelaw Reid asked sensibly: “When did the mere sentence of the Court, without any further proceedings, suffice to hang the culprit?”⁴⁵⁸

Midwestern Democrats howled in protest. “This is another step in the nigger business, and another advance in the Robespierrian highway of tyranny and anarchy,” declared an Ohio editor.⁴⁵⁹ Some Wisconsin newspapers called for Lincoln’s impeachment. Others urged sterner measures. A leading Iowa Democrat confided to his diary that Lincoln was a tyrant whose power could be checked only “by revolution or private assassination.”⁴⁶⁰ Another Iowan, Dennis A. Mahoney, editor of the Dubuque Herald, wrote: “The people who submit to the insolent fanaticism which dictated this last act, are and deserve to be enslaved to the class which Abraham Lincoln self-sufficiently

⁴⁵⁴ Hamilton Gray to Lincoln, Mayville, Kentucky, 7 January 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁵⁵ St. Louis correspondence, 23 September, New York Herald, 27 September 1862.

⁴⁵⁶ Hugh Campbell to Joseph Holt, St. Louis, 26 September 1862, Holt Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁵⁷ Wheeling Press, n.d., copied in Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 2 October 1862.

⁴⁵⁸ Washington correspondence by Agate [Whitelaw Reid], 4 October, Cincinnati Gazette, 8 October 1862.

⁴⁵⁹ Canton, Ohio, Starke County Democrat, 24 September 1864, in Frank L. Klement, Lincoln’s Critics: The Copperheads of the North, ed. Steven K. Rogstad (Shippensburg, Pa.: White Mane, 1999), 114.

⁴⁶⁰ Charles Mason, former chief justice of Iowa, diary entry, 23 September 1862, in Hubert H. Wubben, Civil War in Iowa and the Copperhead Movement (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1980), 84.

declares free. If they possessed a tittle of the spirit which animated Rome when Cataline was expelled from its walls . . . they would hurl him into the Potomac.”⁴⁶¹ Murat Halstead reported that “there are persons who would feel that it was doing God’s service to kill him [Lincoln], if it were not feared that Hamlin is a bigger fool than he is.”⁴⁶²

The English press scouted the Proclamation as a call for servile war leading to “horrible massacres of white women and children, to be followed by the extermination of the black race in the South.” The London Times asked if Lincoln would not “be classed among that catalogue of monsters, the wholesale assassins and butchers of their kind?” The president resembled “a Chinaman beating his two swords together to frighten his enemies.” Scornfully the Thunderer remarked, “Where he has no power Mr. Lincoln will set the negroes free; where he retains power he will consider them as slaves.”⁴⁶³ The organ of Prime Minister Palmerston rejoiced that the “disgraceful” Proclamation “is deservedly reprobated” in England “as one of the bloodiest manifestoes that ever issued from a civilized government.”⁴⁶⁴ Even liberal papers, which might be expected to sympathize with the Proclamation, denounced it as vigorously as moderate and conservative journals.⁴⁶⁵

When John Hay tried to speak to the president about these hostile editorials, Lincoln cut him off, saying that “he had studied that matter so long that he knew more

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 116.

⁴⁶² Halstead to Chase, 19 February 1863, Cincinnati Enquirer, 28 September 1885.

⁴⁶³ Howard Jones, Abraham Lincoln and a New Birth of Freedom: The Union and Slavery in the Diplomacy of the Civil War (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 116.

⁴⁶⁴ London Morning Post, n.d, quoted in Charles C. Coffin’s lecture on the Emancipation Proclamation, Coffin Papers, New England Genealogical Society Library, Boston.

⁴⁶⁵ Richard Allen Heckman, “British Press Reaction to the Emancipation Proclamation,” Lincoln Herald 71 (1969): 150-53.

about it than they did.”⁴⁶⁶ Some critics, like George Francis Train, irritated Lincoln. As that eccentric millionaire went about the country denouncing abolitionists and calling the Proclamation “the cleverest trick of the season,” Lincoln remarked that Train “reminded him of the Irishman’s description of Soda water. ‘It was a tumbler of piss with a fart in it.’”⁴⁶⁷

The passage in the Proclamation which seemed to encourage slave revolts led the New York Express to ask: “Can it be that President Lincoln calculates such a contingency as a servile insurrection consequent upon his emancipation proclamation?”⁴⁶⁸ The Louisville Democrat termed Lincoln “an imbecile” and an “encourager of insurrection, lust, arson, and murder.”⁴⁶⁹ Jefferson Davis indignantly declared to the Confederate Congress: “We may well leave it to the instincts of common humanity to pass judgment of a measure by which millions of human beings of an inferior race, peaceful and contented laborers in their sphere . . . are encouraged to a general assassination of their masters.”⁴⁷⁰ A member of that Congress introduced a resolution condemning the Proclamation as “a gross violation of the usages of civilized warfare, an outrage on the rights of private property, and an invitation to an atrocious servile war,” and recommending “that it should be held up to the execration of mankind and counteracted by severe retaliatory measures.” Other Confederate legislators urged that the war be

⁴⁶⁶ Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 41 (entry for 24 September 1862).

⁴⁶⁷ “George Francis Train,” Boston Commonwealth, 4 October 1862; Adams S. Hill to Sydney Howard Gay, n.p., n.d. [Washington, 18 September 1862], Gay Papers, Columbia University.

⁴⁶⁸ Washington correspondence by H., 24 September, New York Evening Express, 25 September 1862.

⁴⁶⁹ Klement, Lincoln’s Critics, 116.

⁴⁷⁰ Dunbar Rowland, ed., Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist: His Letters, Papers, and Speeches (10 vols.; Jackson: Printed for the Mississippi Dept. of Archives and History, 1923), 5:409.

conducted under the black flag, with no prisoners taken.⁴⁷¹ Many Confederate soldiers shared that view.⁴⁷² In Kentucky, the president’s words were reportedly “translated as designing a rising of the slaves in order to destroy their masters.”⁴⁷³ The Richmond Enquirer condemned “Lincoln’s proclamation ordaining servile insurrection in the Confederate States,” called its author a “fiend,” and exclaimed: “let the civilized world fling its scorpion lash upon him!”⁴⁷⁴ In North Carolina, the Raleigh Standard termed the Proclamation “one of the most monstrously wicked documents that ever emanated from human authority.”⁴⁷⁵

Some administration supporters also objected to that section of the Proclamation. Charles A. Dana confided to Seward that it “jars on me like a wrong tone in music This is the only ‘bad egg’ I see in ‘that pudding’ – & I fear may go far to make it less palatable than it deserves to be.”⁴⁷⁶ Thaddeus Stevens, on the other hand, rejoiced to think that slaves might be “incited to insurrection and give the rebels a taste of real civil war.”⁴⁷⁷

In Europe, conservative newspapers also denounced the Proclamation “as an incitement to servile insurrection and another San Domingo massacre.”⁴⁷⁸ Fear of slave revolts and the possible destruction of the cotton crop alarmed some European

⁴⁷¹ Resolution by Mr. Semmes of Louisiana, New York Herald, 5 October 1862

⁴⁷² Washington correspondence, 8 October, New York Times, 9 October 1862.

⁴⁷³ Washington correspondence by Erastus Brooks, 7 December, New York Evening Express, 8 December 1862.

⁴⁷⁴ Richmond Enquirer, 1 October, copied in the New York Herald, 4 October 1862.

⁴⁷⁵ New York Herald, 22 October 1862.

⁴⁷⁶ Dana to Seward, New York, 23 September 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁷⁷ Palmer, ed., Papers of Stevens, 2:397.

⁴⁷⁸ New York Tribune, 3 October 1862; English papers’ comments reprinted in the New York Herald, 22 October 1862.

governments. England's foreign secretary, Lord John Russell, viewed the Emancipation Proclamation as an attempt to arouse "the passions of the slave to aid the destructive progress of armies." Even staunch friends of the North like Richard Cobden feared that the Proclamation would transform the war into "one of the most bloody & horrible episodes in history." In October, French foreign minister Edouard Drouyn de Lhuys issued a circular to the British and Russian governments alluding to the "irreparable misfortunes" of "a servile war" and calling for joint mediation of the American conflict. Based on a six-month armistice and suspension of the blockade, this proposal was tantamount to diplomatic recognition of the Confederacy. Rejected in London and St. Petersburg, it was shelved by France. Still, Queen Victoria's government was alarmed at the Emancipation Proclamation and predisposed to intervene somehow to end the war and obviate the threat of slave uprisings. Ominously, the influential chancellor of the exchequer, William Gladstone, told an enthusiastic English audience in October: "We may have our own opinions about slavery, we may be for or against the South; but there is no doubt that Jefferson Davis and other leaders of the South have made an army; they are making, it appears, a navy; and they have made what is more than either – they have made a nation."⁴⁷⁹

In the army, reaction to the Proclamation was mixed.⁴⁸⁰ Some officers and men disapproved "in the most emphatic manner."⁴⁸¹ General Fitz John Porter called the document "absurd" and, alluding to the Lincoln's remarks to Chicago clergymen on

⁴⁷⁹ Lynn M. Case and Warren F. Spencer, The United States and France: Civil War Diplomacy (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), 359-73; Jones, Lincoln and a New Birth of Freedom, 84-86, 106-45.

⁴⁸⁰ James M. McPherson, For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 120-26.

⁴⁸¹ Washington correspondence by G, 26 September, New York Evening Express, 27 September 1862.

September 13, ridiculed him “a political coward, who has not the manliness to sustain opinions expressed but a few days before – and can unblushingly see published side by side, his proclamation and his reasons for not issuing it. What a ruler for us to admire!”⁴⁸² McClellan had intended to submit to the president a letter protesting the Emancipation Proclamation “and saying that the Army would never sustain” it but decided not to do so when General William F. Smith told him that he “would neither sustain himself with the army nor the country and that it would only array him in opposition” to the government “and result in disaster to him.”⁴⁸³ Generals John Cochrane, Jacob D. Cox, and Ambrose E. Burnside seconded Smith’s advice. So instead of carrying out his original intention, Little Mac belatedly issued a general order coolly hinting that the administration should be voted out of office. It counseled against criticism of the Proclamation and stated that the “remedy for political errors, if any are committed, is to be found only in the action of the people at the polls.”⁴⁸⁴

But most of the army supported the Proclamation.⁴⁸⁵ A partisan Democrat who, as a medical commissioner, visited the Peninsula reported that “with very few exceptions the whole army is in favor of the most stringent prosecution of the war, using every means in our power to stifle the rebellion, and it regards emancipation as one of our most potent weapons.”⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸² [Porter] to Manton Marble, n.p., 30 September 1862, Marble Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁸³ John Gregory Smith to Lincoln, St. Albans, Vermont, 30 December 1864, University of Vermont, Burlington.

⁴⁸⁴ OR, I, 19, 2:396.

⁴⁸⁵ Two thirds of the soldiers in James McPherson’s sample who expressed an opinion about emancipation up to the spring of 1863 favored it. McPherson estimates that half of the soldiers supported emancipation, a quarter opposed it, and a quarter were indifferent or undecided. McPherson, For Cause and Comrades, 123-24.

⁴⁸⁶ Boston Journal, n.d., copied in the New York Tribune, 30 September 1862.

Conservative Republicans like Richard W. Thompson thought the Proclamation unfair to loyal slaveholders in the Confederacy. In response to this objection, Lincoln told Thompson bluntly that “there were no loyal slave owners in the South” and “avowed his resolution to follow the course dictated by his own conscience.” Thompson recalled that the president assured him with “the utmost composure” that Thompson “would be wiser after awhile.”⁴⁸⁷

Public response to emancipation did not encourage Lincoln. On September 28, he told his vice-president that “while I hope something from the proclamation, my expectations are not as sanguine as are those of some friends. The time for its effect southward has not come; but northward the effect should be instantaneous. It is six days old, and while commendation in newspapers and by distinguished individuals is all that a vain man could wish, the stocks have declined, and troops come forward more slowly than ever. This, looked soberly in the face, is not very satisfactory. We have fewer troops in the field at the end of six days than we had at the beginning – the attrition among the old outnumbering the addition by the new. The North responds to the proclamation sufficiently in breath; but breath alone kills no rebels.”⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁷ Annotation by Thompson on a letter he wrote to Lincoln but did not send, Washington, 26 January 1863, typescript, Thompson Collection, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis; R. W. Thompson, “Abraham Lincoln,” undated manuscript, R. W. Thompson Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁴⁸⁸ Lincoln to Hamlin, Washington, 28 September 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:444.