

## Chapter Twenty-nine

“I Am Not a Bold Man, But I Have the Knack of Sticking to My Promises!”:

### The Emancipation Proclamation

(September-December 1862)

Though Lincoln’s announcement that he would issue an Emancipation Proclamation seemed to do more harm than good in the short run, he refused to back down. His deep commitment to black freedom led him to stand by his decision despite intense pressure.

#### BACKLASH: ELECTORAL REVERSES

The Proclamation, which some commentators dismissed as a ploy to strengthen the Republicans politically, instead contributed to the party’s severe losses in the fall of 1862. As Montgomery Blair had warned, the Proclamation became a club which the Democrats employed to cudgel Republicans in election campaigns that October.<sup>1</sup>

During the fall electoral contests, Democrats relentlessly employed their customary appeal to what the New York Tribune aptly called “that cruel and ungenerous

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<sup>1</sup> V. Jacque Voegeli, Free But Not Equal: The Midwest and the Negro during the Civil War (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 52-67; Forrest G. Wood, Black Scare: The Racist Response to Emancipation and Reconstruction (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 17-39; Frank L. Klement, “Midwestern Opposition to Lincoln’s Emancipation Policy,” Journal of Negro History 49 (1964): 169-83.

prejudice against color which still remains to disgrace our civilization and to impeach our Christianity.”<sup>2</sup> Those appeals were especially virulent in the Midwest.<sup>3</sup> The Cincinnati Commercial justly complained that “the prejudice of race has been inflamed, and used by the Democratic party with an energy and ingenuity perfectly infernal.”<sup>4</sup> Anti-administration editors warned Ohio workingmen that they would “have to leave Ohio and labor where niggers could not come” and urged them to vote Democratic if they did “not desire their place occupied by negroes.”<sup>5</sup> Playing on voters’ fear that emancipated slaves would inundate the Midwest, Democrats adopted as their slogan: “The Constitution as it is, the Union as it was, and the negroes where they are.” An unsuccessful Republican congressional candidate in the Buckeye State explained his defeat to Chase: “I had thought until this year the cry of ‘nigger’ & ‘abolitionism’ were played out, but they never had as much power & effect in this part of the State as at the recent election. Many who had heretofore acted with us voted the straight democratic ticket.”<sup>6</sup> Former Ohio Governor William Allen told his neighbors in Chillicothe that “[e]very white laboring man in the North who does not want to be swapped off for a free nigger should vote the Democratic ticket.” If the slaves were freed, he predicted, almost one million of them, “with their hands reeking in the blood of murdered women and children,” would “cross over into our state” looking for work.<sup>7</sup> Another Ohio Democrat, Congressman Samuel S.

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<sup>2</sup> New York Tribune, 16 October 1862.

<sup>3</sup> Voegeli, Free But Not Equal, 98-102.

<sup>4</sup> Allan Nevins, The War for the Union (4 vols.; New York: Scribner, 1959-1971), 2:319.

<sup>5</sup> The Crisis (Columbus), 5 March 1862, and the Cincinnati Enquirer, 4 August 1862, in Frank L. Klement, The Limits of Dissent: Clement L. Vallandigham & the Civil War (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1970), 106.

<sup>6</sup> Hezekiah S. Bundy to Chase, Reid’s Mill, 18 October 1862, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>7</sup> Reginald Charles Mcgrane, William Allen: A Study in Western Democracy (Columbus: Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, 1925), 157-58.

“Sunset” Cox, advised opponents to heed an eleventh commandment: “Thou shalt not degrade the white race by such intermixtures as emancipation would bring.”<sup>8</sup>

(Like most members of the anti-war faction, Cox was a thoroughgoing racist. When asked why he objected to receiving a black diplomat, he expostulated: “Objection? Gracious heavens! what innocency! Objection to receiving a black man on an equality with the white men of this country? Every objection which instinct, race, prejudice, and institutions make. I have been taught in the history of this country that these Commonwealths and this Union were made for white men; that this Government is a Government of white men; that the men who made it never intended, by anything they did, to place the black race upon an equality with the white.”)<sup>9</sup>

Cox’s party gained a net of thirty-four seats in the U.S. House of Representatives, mostly from the Lower North. In Ohio, they captured fourteen House seats to the Republicans’ five, and in neighboring Indiana, they won seven of the eleven House seats; the parties divided the Pennsylvania House seats evenly. In addition, Democrats won the New York and New Jersey gubernatorial races and captured a majority of legislative seats in New Jersey, Indiana, and Illinois.<sup>10</sup> Samuel Medary, editor of The Crisis in Columbus, spoke for many Ohio Democrats when he crowed that “Free press and a white man’s government is fully established by this vote.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Samuel Sullivan Cox, Eight Years in Congress, From 1857 to 1865 (New York: D. Appleton, 1865), 264.

<sup>9</sup> Congressional Globe, 37<sup>th</sup> Congress 2<sup>nd</sup> session, 2502 (2 June 1862).

<sup>10</sup> Joel H. Silbey, A Respectable Minority: The Democratic Party in the Civil War Era, 1860-1868 (New York: Norton, 1977), 144.

<sup>11</sup> The Crisis (Columbus), 29 October 1862, in Reed W. Smith, Samuel Medary & The Crisis: Testing the Limits of Press Freedom (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1995), 102.

David Davis called the results “disastrous in the extreme” and remarked that the Emancipation Proclamation “has not worked the wonders that was anticipated.”<sup>12</sup> Another of Lincoln’s Illinois friends, W. W. Orme, bemoaned the “terrible reverses,” which were, he thought, “as bad, indeed and worse, than a battle lost.”<sup>13</sup> Maine Senator William P. Fessenden ascribed the setbacks to the “folly of the President” and called the result “disgraceful [in] every way.”<sup>14</sup> Another Pine State lawmaker, Congressman Frederick Pike, believed that if Lincoln “would leave off story telling long enough to look after the war & drive the drunken generals out of the army & cashier those who wish for the success of the rebels . . . we might hope for a successful prosecution of the campaign.”<sup>15</sup> In Minnesota, ill-humored General John Pope also blamed the setback on Lincoln, who “seems striving to conciliate the enemies by driving off & discouraging the friends of the Administration, an operation which has shipwrecked every President since the days of Jackson.”<sup>16</sup> From New Hampshire, former Congressman Mason Tappan wrote that Lincoln was “inefficient” and “[e]very thing is hotch-podge, & no one that knows anything has any influence with the ‘powers that be.’”<sup>17</sup>

Some Radicals consoled themselves with the hope that the administration would now be forced to stop temporizing. “I can scarcely mourn over the elections in the West, and in New York,” said Lydia Maria Child, “for they have driven ‘old Abe’ to the wall.

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<sup>12</sup> David Davis to W. W. Orme, Bloomington, 20 October 1862, Orme Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>13</sup> W. W. Orme to David Davis, Springfield, Missouri, 24 October 1862, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>14</sup> Fessenden to James W. Grimes, Portland, Maine, 19 October 1862, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College.

<sup>15</sup> Frederick Pike to J. S. Pike, Calais, Maine, 22 October 1862, Pike Papers, University of Maine.

<sup>16</sup> John Pope to Valentine B. Horton, St. Paul, 1 November 1862, Pope Papers, New-York Historical Society.

<sup>17</sup> Mason Tappan to George W. Fogg, Concord, 10 October 1862, Mason Tappan Papers, New Hampshire Historical Society.

Now, the Republican party must ‘do or die.’” She thanked God “for putting them in that fix! At last, I really believe ‘old Abe’ has got his back up. . . . I think we shall now go ahead in earnest; and, having tried everything else without success, we shall at last rely upon principle.”<sup>18</sup>

On October 16, Nicolay reported from the White House that “[w]e are all blue here today on account of the election news.”<sup>19</sup> The defeats astounded Lincoln, who had not anticipated such a severe drubbing.<sup>20</sup> He told John W. Forney that he regretted the defeat of Pennsylvania Representative James H. Campbell “more than that of any other member of Congress.”<sup>21</sup> But his spirits quickly recovered, and a few days later he told a caller who asked why he seemed so upbeat: “there is no use in being blue. The elections have not gone to suit me, but I have felt a good deal better since I saw a regiment polled to ascertain the sentiments of the soldiers. Eight hundred out of a thousand voted to sustain my policy. And so it is with most of the troops . . . . Then too about the military situation. Things drag too much to suit me. I have tried my best to crowd matters. But we shall hear of something good ere long. Things look very well in comparison with the aspect two months ago, and this fall and winter I believe will make them look a great deal

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<sup>18</sup> Lydia Child to Sarah Shaw, Wayland, 11 November 1862, in Lydia Maria Child: Selected Letters, 1817-1880, ed. Milton Meltzer and Patricia G. Holland (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), 420.

<sup>19</sup> Nicolay to Therenia Bates, Washington, 16 October 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), 89.

<sup>20</sup> Washington correspondence, 20 October, National Anti-Slavery Standard (New York), 25 October 1862.

<sup>21</sup> James H. Campbell to his wife Julia, Washington, 28 January 1863, Campbell Papers, Schoff Civil War Collection, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

better than they do now.”<sup>22</sup> On October 27, Lincoln met with John A. Jones, who reported that he “looks well & cheerful.”<sup>23</sup>

But the November election results plunged Lincoln back into despair. Democrat Horatio Seymour won the New York gubernatorial contest, which was widely regarded as a repudiation of “Old Lincompoop.”<sup>24</sup> Even more important in causing Republican losses was the lack of military success. George Templeton Strong estimated that two thirds of the successful candidate’s supporters “meant to say by their votes, ‘Messrs. Lincoln, Seward, Stanton & Co., you have done your work badly, so far. You are humbugs. My business is stopped, I have got taxes to pay, my wife’s third cousin was killed on the Chickahominy, and the war is no nearer an end than it was a year ago. I am disgusted with you and your party and shall vote for the governor or the congressman you disapprove, just to spite you.’”<sup>25</sup> When asked how he felt after the Democrats’ victory in New York, Lincoln replied: “Somewhat like that boy in Kentucky, who stubbed his toe while running to see his sweetheart. The boy said he was too big to cry, and far too badly hurt to laugh.”<sup>26</sup> He told Massachusetts Senator Henry Wilson: “I confess that I am grieved at the results of these elections. This intelligence will go to Europe; it will be construed there as a condemnation of the war; it will go into the land of the rebellion, and will encourage the leading rebels and nerve the arms of the rebel soldiers fighting our

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<sup>22</sup> Washington correspondence by Van [D. W. Bartlett], 21 October, Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 25 October 1862. Bartlett’s informant was a friend who had spoken with the president a few days earlier.

<sup>23</sup> John A. Jones to David Davis, Georgetown, D.C., 27 October 1862, Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>24</sup> George W. Towner to Albert G. Myrick, Nyack, N.Y., 9 November 1862, Myrick Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>25</sup> Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas, eds., The Diary of George Templeton Strong, 1835-1875 (4 vols.; New York: Macmillan, 1952), 3:272 (entry for 5 November 1862).

<sup>26</sup> Washington correspondence, 6 November, New York Times, 7 November 1862.

men in the field. It is true, many of those men elected profess to be war Democrats; but the resolutions of their conventions, the tone of their leading presses, and their general action will be construed everywhere against the cause of our country.”<sup>27</sup>

Lincoln had good reason to lament the disastrous result in Illinois. Democrats elected their state ticket by 14,000 votes; their congressional candidates won nine of the fourteen seats; and they gained control of the legislature with a margin of 13-12 in the Senate and 54-32 in the House, thus assuring that Orville H. Browning would be ousted from the U.S. Senate.<sup>28</sup> (Some thought it would make little difference politically, for Browning allegedly planned to establish a conservative third party in opposition to the administration.)<sup>29</sup> Most painful for Lincoln was the defeat of his dear friend Leonard Swett in a congressional race against John Todd Stuart.<sup>30</sup> Swett’s law partner feared that the Democratic victory in the Eighth Congressional District “will palsy the arm of the President.”<sup>31</sup> In September, the War Department issued an order resettling some newly-liberated slaves in Illinois; it proved to be a blunder which became the most significant campaign issue and helped swell the Democrats’ vote.<sup>32</sup> In a terse post-mortem, Swett told a friend that the “Proclamation hurt rather than helped us. Negroes from the south

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<sup>27</sup> Boston Evening Journal, 3 November 1862.

<sup>28</sup> Bruce Tap, “Race, Rhetoric, and Emancipation: The Election of 1862 in Illinois,” Civil War History 39 (1993): 101-25; Arthur Charles Cole, The Era of the Civil War, 1848-1878 (Springfield: Illinois Centennial Commission, 1919), 296-98.

<sup>29</sup> Lyman Trumbull to Zachariah Chandler, Springfield, 9 November 1862, Chandler Papers, Library of Congress; Jackson Grimshaw to O. M. Hatch, Quincy, 8 September 1862, Hatch Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>30</sup> Harry E. Pratt, “The Repudiation of Lincoln’s War Policy in 1862 – Stuart-Swett Congressional Campaign,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 24 (1931): 129-40; David Davis to Leonard Swett, Lenox, Massachusetts, 26 November 1862, Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>31</sup> Lawrence Weldon to W. W. Orme, Springfield, 24 November 1862, in Pratt, “Repudiation of Lincoln’s War Policy,” 140.

<sup>32</sup> Tap, “Election of 1862 in Illinois,” 107-22; W. W. Orme to David Davis, Springfield, Missouri, 29 October 1862, Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield; David Davis to Lincoln, Lincoln, Illinois, 14 October 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

were taken into our state. Fifty or more went to Livingston. This did great harm.”<sup>33</sup>

Lyman Trumbull reported that many Illinois Republicans “believed that their sons & relations were being sacrificed to the incompetency, indisposition or treason of a great many Democratic generals” and therefore “were unwilling to sustain an administration which allowed this.”<sup>34</sup>

One consolation for Lincoln was the defeat in June of a proposed new Illinois constitution that would have severely crippled the war effort.<sup>35</sup> (Republicans who had mounted a fierce effort against it were upset that Lincoln, who “said it ought to be defeated,” had “lifted not a finger” to help them.)<sup>36</sup> The president also derived solace from the results in Missouri, where emancipationists gained a majority of the state’s congressional seats.<sup>37</sup> He was particularly glad that Frank Blair was reelected, saying “that it was the only good news he had heard for many days.” The gains in Missouri, he added, “consoled him for the loss of his own [state]” and “more than compensated him for all defeats elsewhere.”<sup>38</sup> Providing further comfort was news that Republicans had kept control of the U.S. House (101-77), even though the opposition gained a net of

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<sup>33</sup> Swett to Orme, 18 November 1862, Orme Papers, in Tap, “Election of 1862 in Illinois,” 122.

<sup>34</sup> Trumbull to Zachariah Chandler, Springfield, 9 November 1862, Chandler Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>35</sup> Cole, Era of the Civil War, 267-71.

<sup>36</sup> Adams S. Hill to Sydney Howard Gay, n.p., n.d. [Washington, ca. 15 June 1862], Gay Papers, Columbia University.

<sup>37</sup> William Earl Parrish, Turbulent Partnership: Missouri and the Union, 1861-1865 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1963), 136; \*Peterson, Freedom and Franchise, 121-22; William E. Parrish, Frank Blair: Lincoln’s Conservative (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 146-52; Frank Blair to Lincoln, St. Louis, 14 November 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; David Davis to Leonard Swett, Lenox, Massachusetts, 26 November 1862, Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. Six of the nine congressmen elected openly supported emancipation, as did the speaker of the state house of representatives, who in January won that post by a vote of 67-42. The American Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1862 (New York: D. Appleton, 1863), 595.

<sup>38</sup> Virginia Jeans Laas, ed., Wartime Washington: The Civil War Letters of Elizabeth Blair Lee (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 202, 204, 209.



thirty-four seats, mostly from the Lower North. With some justice, Democrats howled that the administration had packed Congress by having military forces interfere in Kentucky and other Border States.

Lincoln had been warned that backlash against the Emancipation Proclamation would hurt the Republicans at the polls, but that did not deter him from announcing it a scant three weeks before crucial elections in the Midwest and Pennsylvania. Months later he told a Radical delegation from Missouri and Kansas that “many good men, some earnest Republicans and some from very far North, were opposed to the issuing of that proclamation, holding it unwise and of doubtful legality.”<sup>39</sup> His willingness to run a grave political risk indicated the depth of his commitment to black freedom.<sup>40</sup> Looking back on that risk two years later, he said: “I hoped for greater gain than loss; but of this I was not entirely confident.”<sup>41</sup> To the Rev. Mr. John McClintock, an ultra-Radical, he recalled his anxiety about the timing of the announcement: “When I issued that proclamation, I was in great doubt about it myself. I did not think that the people had been quite educated up to it, and I feared its effects upon the Border States, yet I think it was right; I knew it would help our cause in Europe, and I trusted in God and did it.” He added that “Providence is stronger than either you or I.”<sup>42</sup> (McClintock complained to his daughter

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<sup>39</sup> Hay-Stoddard memorandum of a meeting Lincoln had on 30 September 1863, Nicolay-Hay Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>40</sup> Allen C. Guelzo, Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 166-68.

<sup>41</sup> Lincoln to A. G. Hodges, Washington, 4 April 1864, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 7:282.

<sup>42</sup> John McClintock, sermon of 16 April 1865, in Our Martyred President: Voices from the Pulpit of New York and Brooklyn (New York: Tibbal and Whiting, 1865), 136.

that if the president “had nerve enough to issue the proclamation as the very beginning of the War, the rebellion would never have assumed the proportion it has.”<sup>43</sup>

Lincoln’s fear was justified. In late October, a Kentucky Unionist reported that the “proclamation damaged us very much.”<sup>44</sup> The president told George W. Julian that the “proclamation was to stir the country; but it has done about as much harm as good.”<sup>45</sup>

In light of the Republicans’ dismal showing at the polls, it was widely speculated that Lincoln might renege on his commitment to issue the Proclamation.<sup>46</sup> On November 6, Theodore Tilton reported that the president “has spoken to at least six persons, lamenting the issue of his Proclamation, and calling it the great mistake of his life.”<sup>47</sup> One of those half-dozen was Wendell Phillips. When asked about his alleged remark to Phillips, Lincoln did not deny that he had made it and implied that “he had put himself into a minority with the people, and he well knew that it was impossible for him to carry on a great war against the feelings of majority of the people.”<sup>48</sup> (William Whiting, solicitor of the War Department, heatedly denied that Lincoln had made such a statement.)<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> John McClintock to his daughter Jane, 20 January 1863, McClintock Papers, Emory University, in Victor B. Howard, Religion and the Radical Republican Movement, 1860-1870 (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 55.

<sup>44</sup> Louisville correspondence by Agate [Whitelaw Reid], 25 October 1862, in James G. Smart, ed., A Radical View: The “Agate” Dispatches of Whitelaw Reid, 1861-1865 (2 vols.; Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1976), 1:91.

<sup>45</sup> Julian in Allen Thorndike Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln by Distinguished Men of His Time (New York: North American Review, 1888), 55-56.

<sup>46</sup> Theodore Tilton to Wendell Phillips, Brooklyn, [6 November 1862], Phillips Papers, Harvard University; Washington correspondence by Van [D. W. Bartlett], 11 November, Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican, 15 November 1862; New York Herald, 19 October 1862; Washington National Intelligencer, 6 November 1862; Guelzo, Emancipation Proclamation, 177.

<sup>47</sup> Theodore Tilton to Wendell Phillips, Brooklyn, [6 November 1862], Phillips Papers, Harvard University.

<sup>48</sup> Boston Commonwealth, 4 December 1863.

<sup>49</sup> Undated letter by Whiting to a gentleman in Liverpool, England, in the New York Evening Post, 29 January 1864.

But Lincoln repeatedly assured callers that he would not renege on his pledge to issue the Proclamation.<sup>50</sup> On November 20, “with a positiveness that was unmistakable,” he confided to some intimate friends that “his views on this important question had in no wise been modified by the result of the recent elections; that he had issued the Proclamation of September after long and thoughtful deliberation, and that he should stand by it up to and on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January.”<sup>51</sup> That same day he dashed off a heated letter to Kentucky Unionists who complained about Union troops infringing on the rights of slaveholders: “I believe you are acquainted with the American Classics, (if there be such) and probably remember a speech of Patrick Henry, in which he represented a certain character in the revolutionary times, as totally disregarding all questions of country, and ‘hoarsely bawling, beef! Beef!! Beef!!!’ Do you not know that I may as well surrender this contest, directly, as to make any order, the obvious purpose of which would be to return fugitive slaves?” After cooling off, Lincoln decided not to send this missive.<sup>52</sup> The next day he assured other Kentucky Unionists “that he would rather die than take back a word of the Proclamation of Freedom.”<sup>53</sup> Similarly, the president explained why a would-be caller who wished the Proclamation to be withheld could not obtain a White House interview: “I shall not do anything of the kind, and why should he or I waste time or

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<sup>50</sup> Providence Journal, 15 November 1862; Washington correspondence, 25 November, Cincinnati Commercial, 29 November 1862.

<sup>51</sup> Washington correspondence, 21 November, New York Tribune, 22 November 1862.

<sup>52</sup> Lincoln to George Robertson, Washington, 20 November 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:502. On the Robertson case, see an article in the Cleveland Daily Herald, [late 1862] in Ira Berlin, ed., The Destruction of Slavery (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 539-44; Charles C. Coffin, Four Years of Fighting: A Volume of Personal Observation with the Army and Navy, from the First Battle of Bull Run to the Fall of Richmond (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1866), 127-34; Roy P. Basler, “Beef! Beef! Beef!: Lincoln and Judge Robertson,” Abraham Lincoln Quarterly 6 (1951): 400-7; J. Winston Coleman, Jr., “Lincoln and ‘Old Buster,’” Lincoln Herald 46 (February 1944): 3-9.

<sup>53</sup> Washington correspondence, 23 November, New York Tribune, 24 November 1862.

words over the subject?”<sup>54</sup> Alluding to the slaves, he said: “My word is out to these people, and I can’t take it back.”<sup>55</sup> In mid-December, he informed Border State congressmen and senators lobbying against the Proclamation “that he was an Anti-Slavery man, and considered Slavery to be the right arm of the rebellion, and that it must be lopped off.”<sup>56</sup> He feared that “if he should refuse to issue his proclamation there would be a rebellion in the north, and that a dictator would be placed over his head within the week.”<sup>57</sup> On Christmas Eve, the president “said he would not if he could, and could not if he would, withhold his decree of emancipation.”<sup>58</sup> Six days later, he told a pair of western politicians: “Gentlemen, I am not a bold man, but I have the knack of sticking to my promises!”<sup>59</sup> In late November, he assured T. J. Barnett of the Interior Department “that he should abate no jot of his emancipation policy” and that “the foundations of slavery have been cracked by the war, by the Rebels.” He derided “the notion that servile insurrection is stimulated by his proclamation.” The problem most troubling to Lincoln, Barnett reported, “is to provide for the blacks.” He speculated “that many of them will colonize and that the South will be compelled to resort to the apprentice system.”<sup>60</sup>

#### DISMISSING DULL AUGERS: BUELL AND McCLELLAN

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<sup>54</sup> Washington correspondence, 4 November, New York Evening Post, 5 November 1862.

<sup>55</sup> Reminiscences of George Boutwell in a speech at Lowell, Massachusetts, 19 April 1865, clipping in a scrapbook, Otto Eisenschiml Papers, University of Iowa.

<sup>56</sup> Washington correspondence, 19 December, New York Times, 20 December 1862. This was said on the evening of December 18.

<sup>57</sup> Theodore Calvin Pease and James G. Randall, eds., The Diary of Orville Hickman Browning (2 vols.; Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1925-1933), 1:607 (entry for 30 December 1862).

<sup>58</sup> Washington correspondence, 25 December, Cincinnati Gazette, 27 December 1862; Washington correspondence, 25 December, New York Tribune, 26 December 1862.

<sup>59</sup> Washington correspondence, 30 December, New York Evening Post, 31 December 1862.

<sup>60</sup> T. J. Barnett to S. L. M. Barlow, Washington, 30 November 1862, Barlow Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

In addition to backlash against the Emancipation Proclamation, the absence of military success hurt Republicans at the polls. Writing from Illinois in October, Horace White told Lincoln: “If we are beaten in this State, it will be because McClellan and Buell won’t fight.”<sup>61</sup> White’s colleague on the Chicago Tribune, Joseph Medill, was especially indignant at McClellan. The Democrats, he said, were “taking advantage of the treachery that keeps the army motionless are fomenting public discontent, and promising a peace, if brought into power. The future is dark and dismal. Lincoln issued his proclamation and then set down on his d[errier]e contented. But proclamations like faith without works are dead.”<sup>62</sup> In Ohio, William M. Dickson warned that “the want of all firmness in dismissing incompetency and punishing criminality,” along with “a facile disposition to reward importunity,” was threatening “to destroy all respect for the President” and placing an “overwhelming weight upon us in the approaching elections.”<sup>63</sup> An Iowan bemoaned “the lamentable want of vigor and energy in the conduct of the war” and reported that the “people out here in the North West on whom the burdens of the war have fallen more heavily than on the people of any other section of the loyal portion of the country, are heart-sick at the manner in which the war has been conducted— They are fast losing all heart, and all hope— Within the last year the loyal states have lost hundreds of thousands of their sons and hundreds of millions of their means.”<sup>64</sup> A prominent Westerner noted that “many persons are getting tired of a war which seems to them to

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<sup>61</sup> Horace White to Lincoln, Chicago, 22 October 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>62</sup> Medill to Ozias M. Hatch, Chicago, 13 October 1862, Hatch Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>63</sup> W. M. Dickson to Friedrich Hassaurek, Cincinnati, 10 April 1862, Hassaurek Papers, Ohio Historical Society.

<sup>64</sup> Francis Springer to Hawkins Taylor, Burlington, Iowa, 19 October 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

drag heavily . . . . they have no confidence in the generals, especially Halleck, McClellan and Buell. So many things look as if . . . the plan of these men is not to subdue the South, but to wear out the patience of the North.”<sup>65</sup> William Cullen Bryant, whose New York Evening Post had long been belaboring the administration for its timidity and tardiness, advised Lincoln that the Democrats might well carry New York because of “the inactivity of our armies in putting down the rebellion. I have been pained to hear lately from persons zealously loyal, the expression of a doubt as to whether the administration sincerely desires the speedy annihilation of the rebel forces. We who are better informed acquit the administration of the intention to prolong the war though we cannot relieve it of the responsibility— These inopportune pauses, this strange sluggishness in military operations seem to us little short of absolute madness.”<sup>66</sup> Hiram Barney issued a similar warning.<sup>67</sup>

Lincoln’s friend Noah Brooks informed readers of the Sacramento Union “that the slow conduct of the war had more to do with the result of the elections than anything else. This is the view which the President took of it, and it must be admitted that by adopting, as he did, that hypothesis, he was more deeply chagrined than if he had supposed that his emancipation policy had received a signal rebuke.”<sup>68</sup>

After Antietam, McClellan feared that Lee would attack and that the Union army was too disorganized to move. So he dawdled in his usual fashion, allowing the

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<sup>65</sup> Letter from an unidentified correspondent to B. F. M., n.p., n.d., Washington correspondence by B. F. M., 25 October, Cincinnati Gazette, 30 October 1862.

<sup>66</sup> William Cullen Bryant to Lincoln, New York, 22 October 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Charles H. Brown, William Cullen Bryant (New York: Scribner, 1971), 441-45.

<sup>67</sup> Barney to Chase, New York, 24 October 1862, Chase Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

<sup>68</sup> Washington correspondence, 9 December 1862, Sacramento Daily Union, 5 January 1863, in Michael Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed: Civil War Dispatches of Noah Brooks (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 14.

Confederates to escape across the Potomac. When Little Mac boasted that he had achieved a great victory by driving the enemy from Union soil, the “hearts of 10 million people sank within them,” according to Lincoln.<sup>69</sup> Bitterly, Interior Secretary Caleb B. Smith remarked that “darkness and doubts rest upon the future while the best blood of the country has been poured out like water and sorrow and mourning has been brought to almost every hearthstone, and we are left to enjoy the consolation afforded by Gen McClellan in his pompous announcement that ‘Pa. and Md. are safe.’ I wonder that he did not add and so is New England.”<sup>70</sup>

No one’s heart sank deeper than Lincoln’s. In early October, over the objections of the cabinet, he visited the Army of the Potomac hoping to goad McClellan into action.<sup>71</sup> In addition, Lincoln told Ozias Hatch, he wanted “to satisfy himself personally without the intervention of anybody, of the purposes intentions and fidelity of McClellan, his officers, and the army.”<sup>72</sup> The administration reportedly had “a dread of the army” and feared “revolution in the North.”<sup>73</sup> This anxiety was not irrational. In late September, William M. Dickson concluded that “[i]f McClellan had been defeated in Md. there would have been a revolution. . . . wise and good men are & have been considering the propriety of revolution, of a provisional government. The atmosphere was murky with

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<sup>69</sup> 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), 62 (entry for 14 July 1863).

<sup>70</sup> Smith to John F. Potter, Washington, 4 October 1862, Potter Papers, Wisconsin State Historical Society.

<sup>71</sup> Washington correspondence, 3 November, New York Tribune, 9 November 1862.

<sup>72</sup> O. M. Hatch interviewed by Nicolay, Springfield, June 1875, in Michael Burlingame, ed., An Oral History of Abraham Lincoln: John G. Nicolay's Interviews and Essays (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 16.

<sup>73</sup> T. J. Barnett to S. L. M. Barlow, 23 September 1862, Barlow Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

treason after Pope's defeats, a vain, weak man, put in power by a weak President."<sup>74</sup>

General Pope reported that officers in the Army of the Potomac "talk openly of Lincoln's weakness and the necessity of replacing him by some stronger man."<sup>75</sup> The adjutant general of the Army of the Potomac, Thomas M. Key, recalled that "the 'traitor' element near McClellan had constantly grown bolder" and that "they daily talked of overthrowing the Government and making McClellan dictator." After the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation was announced, "this element felt that McClellan would not long remain in command: that then was the time to move or never – that an appeal could be made to the army setting forth that this proclamation was a usurpation, the conversion of the war for the Union into a John Brown Abolition raid and thus was a subversion of the Constitution absolving the army from its allegiance: that a movement should be made upon Washington to restore the Constitution."<sup>76</sup>

During his three days with the army in Maryland, Lincoln visited hospitals, including one which housed some Confederates. To them he remarked "that if they had no objection he would be pleased to take them by the hand" and that "the solemn obligations which we owe to our country and posterity compel the prosecution of this war, and it followed that many were our enemies through uncontrollable circumstances, and he bore them no malice, and could take them by the hand with sympathy and good feeling." The Confederates, after a brief silence, "came forward, and each silently but

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<sup>74</sup> W. M. Dickson to Friedrich Hassaurek, Cincinnati, 27 September 1862, Hassaurek Papers, Ohio Historical Society.

<sup>75</sup> Pope to Richard Yates, St. Paul, 21 September 1862, copy, Samuel Kirkwood Papers, Iowa State Archives, Des Moines.

<sup>76</sup> William M. Dickson "A Leaf from the Unwritten History of the Rebellion," draft, Dickson Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan. Key made a similar statement to Nathaniel Paige of the New York Tribune. New York Tribune, n.d., copied in the Washington Capital, 21 March 1880.



fervently shook the hand of the President.” He then approached those too seriously wounded to stand and “bid them to be of good cheer; assuring them that every possible care should be bestowed upon them to ameliorate their condition.” There was not a dry Union or Confederate eye in that hospital.<sup>77</sup>

Astride the horse of General E. V. Sumner’s son, Lincoln inspected the troops, reviewing twelve divisions and riding forty miles. When warned that the steed was “a bit high-spirited,” the president laughingly replied: “That makes it the more interesting. I’ll try him.” Skillfully he mounted and took the reins so that the horse “knew at once that this rider belonged there.”<sup>78</sup> As he passed the crimson-clad the Fifth New York Zouaves, which had suffered heavy losses, he stopped and remarked to General George Sykes: “And these are the red legged devils. I know from the reports that there has been no such thing as beating them, even round a stump.” Turning to the troops, he said: “Boys, your thinned ranks and shattered flags tell the story of your bravery. The people thank you and so do I.” At General Brooks Morell’s division he paused again. “Those flags are more tattered now than when I saw them at Harrison’s Landing,” he told the general; “the regiments have reason to be proud of such flags, and you of such men.”<sup>79</sup> He was dismayed to see how small some regiments had become since he last visited the army. “I thought they were merely a corporal’s guard,” he said in astonishment.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Washington correspondence by W., 7 October, Cincinnati Commercial, 8 October 1862. The author claimed that he witnessed the scene.

<sup>78</sup> General S. S. Sumner, “General Sumner and Lincoln,” The Magazine of History with Notes and Queries, Extra number, no. 153 (1924) Rare Lincolniana no. 37, p. 38.

<sup>79</sup> Headquarters of the Army of the Potomac correspondence, 4 October, New York Herald, 7 October 1862.

<sup>80</sup> Washington correspondence, 6 October, Philadelphia Inquirer, 7 October 1862.

The soldiers were pleased to have the president in their midst. One observed that as he reviewed the ranks on October 3, his “kindly smile . . . touched the hearts of the bronzed, rough-looking men more than one can express. It was like an electric shock. It flew from elbow to elbow; and, with one loud cheer which made the air ring, the suppressed feeling gave vent, conveying to the good President that his smile had gone home, and found a ready response.”<sup>81</sup> A sergeant from Massachusetts reported that he “could easily perceive why and how he was called ‘Honest Abe.’ . . . I think his coming down, or up, to see us done us all good.” Another soldier wrote that “[w]e marched proudly away, for we all felt proud to know that we had been permitted to see and salute him.”<sup>82</sup>

Several troops noted that Lincoln “looked careworn and sorrowful.”<sup>83</sup> One thought the president appeared “much more careworn” than his pictures, so much so that it seemed as if “one of his feet is in the grave.”<sup>84</sup>

The army’s conservative Democrats were less enthusiastic. One of them, Colonel Charles S. Wainwright, described Lincoln unflatteringly: “Republican simplicity is well enough, but I should have preferred to see the President of the United States traveling with a little more regard to appearances than can be afforded by a common ambulance, with his long legs doubled up so that his knees almost struck his chin, and grinning out of

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<sup>81</sup> John L. Parker, Henry Wilson's Regiment (Boston: Rand Avery, 1887), 205. Cf. Robert Goldthwaite Carter, Four Brothers in Blue; or, Sunshine and Shadows of the War of the Rebellion, A Story of the Great Civil War from Bull Run to Appomattox (Washington: Gibson Brothers, 1913), 121.

<sup>82</sup> William C. Davis, Lincoln's Men: How President Lincoln Became Father to an Army and a Nation (New York: Free Press, 1999), 81.

<sup>83</sup> Thomas H. Mann to his family, 7 October 1862, in John J. Hennessy, ed., Fighting with the Eighteenth Massachusetts: The Civil War Memoir of Thomas H. Mann (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 106.

<sup>84</sup> Walter and Bob Carter to an unidentified correspondent, opposite Shepardstown, 3 October 1862, in Carter, Four Brothers in Blue, 137.

the windows like a baboon.” The chief executive, Wainwright recorded in his journal, “not only is the ugliest man I ever saw, but the most uncouth and gawky in his manners and appearance.”<sup>85</sup> A Hoosier told his parents that “Old Abe looked decidedly hard.”<sup>86</sup>

One evening Lincoln visited the battlefield strewn with hundreds of dead horses and the clothing of dead and wounded troops. He also noticed innumerable graves, among them one with a grim inscription: “Here lies the bodies of sixty rebels. The wages of sin is death!” Over another mass grave a sign read: “Here lies the body of General Anderson and eighty other rebels.”<sup>87</sup>

During his stay, Lincoln spoke often with McClellan, who reported that the president “was very kind personally – told me he was convinced I was the best general in the country etc etc. He was very affable & I really think he does feel very kindly towards me personally.”<sup>88</sup> Though pleasant in manner, Lincoln was stern in substance, asking tough questions and offering blunt criticism. The president was puzzled to see most of the new recruits in Frederick, twenty miles from the veteran army units. “Why was this? Why were not green troops and veterans mixed together?” he asked McClellan.

“We have not tent equipage and cannot well move up the new levies!” came the reply.

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<sup>85</sup> Allan Nevins, ed., A Diary of Battle: The Personal Journals of Colonel Charles S. Wainwright, 1861-1865 (New York: Harcourt: Brace & World, 1962), 109 (entry for 2 October 1862).

<sup>86</sup> Flavius J. Bellamy to his parents, Sharpsburg, 4 October 1862, Flavius J. Bellamy Papers, Indiana State Library.

<sup>87</sup> Headquarters of the Army of the Potomac correspondence, 2 October, New York Herald, 7 October 1862.

<sup>88</sup> McClellan to his wife, 5 October 1862, Stephen W. Sears, ed., The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1989), 490.

“Why are the troops any worse off at Sharpsburg without tents than at Frederick without tents?” the president asked. No satisfactory answer was offered.<sup>89</sup>

Frankly Lincoln told the general “that he w[oul]d be a ruined man if he did not move forward, move rapidly & effectively.”<sup>90</sup> According to the New York journalist George Wilkes, Lincoln also said to McClellan: “I wish to call your attention to a fault in your character – a fault which is the sum of my observations of you, in connection with this war. You merely get yourself ready to do a good thing – no man can do that better – you make all the necessary sacrifices of blood and time, and treasure, to secure a victory, but whether from timidity, self-distrust, or some other motive inexplicable to me, you always stop short just on this side of results.”<sup>91</sup> He instructed McClellan to launch an advance within two weeks.<sup>92</sup> Unmoved by Lincoln’s criticism, the general wrote his wife about the Presidential entourage: “These people don’t know what an army requires & therefore act stupidly.”<sup>93</sup>

If the Young Napoleon was disgusted with Lincoln, the feeling was mutual. One evening, the president asked his friend Ozias M. Hatch as they stood on a hill and surveyed the vast encampment: “Hatch, what do you suppose all these people are?”

“Why, I suppose it to be a part of the grand army.”

Lincoln, “in a tone of patient but melancholy sarcasm,” corrected him: “No, you are mistaken.”

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<sup>89</sup> Washington correspondence by Van [D. W. Bartlett], 7 October, Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican, 11 October 1862. Bartlett’s source was a member of the presidential entourage.

<sup>90</sup> Lincoln told this to David Davis. David Davis to Leonard Swett, 26 November 1862, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>91</sup> Spirit of the Times (New York), n.d., copied in the Cincinnati Commercial, 24 October 1862.

<sup>92</sup> Washington correspondence by Van [D. W. Bartlett], 21 October, Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican, 25 October 1862.

<sup>93</sup> McClellan to his wife, 2 October 1862, Sears, ed., McClellan Papers, 488.

“What are they then?”

“That is General McClellan’s body guard.”<sup>94</sup>

At Frederick, en route back to Washington, troops surrounded Lincoln’s carriage and shook both of his hands so vigorously that they almost dislodged his hat.<sup>95</sup>

Though Lincoln “expressed himself eminently satisfied with the discipline and appearance of the troops,” he was dismayed to learn they numbered only 93,000, though 180,000 were on the muster rolls.<sup>96</sup> He cited similar figures to Samuel F. P. Du Pont as he bemoaned the “melting away” of the army. “These are the facts,” he told the admiral; “how they are to be cured I don’t know.” In part, Lincoln seemed to blame the Sanitary Commission, which he called “the sentimental department of the army.” He evidently shared Halleck’s view that commission members encouraged the discharge of many soldiers who were not seriously sick or wounded.<sup>97</sup> (In August, Lincoln had lamented to Benjamin Brown French that “although the army consisted nominally of 600,000 men, from the best information that he could get there were not, at that moment, over 362,000 available fighting men in our army.”)<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> O. M. Hatch interviewed by Nicolay, Springfield, June 1875, in Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 16.

<sup>95</sup> Horace Furness to his wife, Frederick, 10 October 1862, Horace Howard Furness Joyce, ed., The Letters of Horace Furness (2 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1922), 1:114.

<sup>96</sup> Sharpsburg correspondence, 3 October, New York Times, 12 October 1862; Pease and Randall, eds., Browning Diary, 1:594 (entry for 12 December 1862); Horace Furness to his wife, Washington, 24 November 1862, in Joyce, ed., Letters of Furness, 1:125-27; Leonard Swett to his wife Laura, New York, 10 August 1862, David Davis Family Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>97</sup> Du Pont to his wife, Washington, 16 October 1862, and at sea aboard the Keystone, 10 21 October 1862; and to Henry Winter Davis, 25 October 1862, in John D. Hayes, ed., Samuel Francis Du Pont: A Selection from his Civil War Letters (3 vols.; Ithaca, N.Y.: Published for the Eleutherian Mills Historical Library by the Cornell University Press, 1969), 2:245-47, 251-53.

<sup>98</sup> Benjamin Brown French, Witness to the Young Republic: A Yankee's Journal, 1828-1870, ed. Donald B. Cole and John J. McDonough (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1989), 405.

Some of the officers who should have been in the field infested Washington, availing themselves of brothels and saloons. “These fellows and the Congressmen do vex me sorely!” Lincoln exclaimed.<sup>99</sup>

One way to cure the absentee problem was to crack down on deserters and bounty jumpers. In late November, when asked to offer encouragement to the ladies of the Sanitary Commission, he balked, explaining that the army had far fewer men reporting for duty than were officially enrolled. “Order the army to march any place! Why it’s jes’ like shovellin’ fleas.” To the suggestion that he shoot stragglers, he replied: “Oh, I ca-an’t do that, you know.”<sup>100</sup>

After Halleck and Stanton showed the president long lists of absentees, however, he “sternly pledged himself . . . to pursue the most rigorous policy with these offenders, and that by executions, dismissals, ball-and-chain labor for the whole term of their enlistment, and other of the severest penalties, he is resolved to deprive the rebels of the great advantage they have heretofore enjoyed over us in the means necessary to preserve discipline, and prevent the crimes of straggling, absenteeism and desertion.”<sup>101</sup> In November, one thousand officers absent without leave from their units were dismissed.<sup>102</sup> But the number of soldiers executed for desertion was, according to surviving records, only 147.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Washington correspondence by Van [D. W. Bartlett], 17 December, Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican, 19 December 1862.

<sup>100</sup> Lincoln quoted by Frederick Law Olmsted in Nevins and Thomas, eds., Strong Diary, 3:278 (entry for 13 December 1862); Horace Furness to his wife, Washington, 24 November 1862, Joyce, ed., Letters of Furness, 1:125-27.

<sup>101</sup> Washington correspondence, 18 November, New York Times, 19 November 1862.

<sup>102</sup> Washington correspondence, 20 November, New York Times, 21 November 1862.

<sup>103</sup> Ella Lonn, Desertion during the Civil War (New York: Century, 1928); Thomas P. Lowry, Don't Shoot That Boy!: Abraham Lincoln and Military Justice (Mason City, Iowa: Savas, 1999), 85-142.

Shortly after his return to Washington on October 4, Lincoln had Halleck order McClellan to “cross the Potomac and give battle to the enemy or drive him south. Your army must move now while the roads are good.”<sup>104</sup> But to no avail. Three days later, Old Brains lamented that “I cannot persuade him to advance an inch.”<sup>105</sup> For the next month, Little Mac deluged Washington authorities with justifications for staying put. Among other things, he complained that his men lacked shoes, clothing, and horses.

In response to McClellan’s explanation that his horses were exhausted, Lincoln sent a tart reply through Halleck: “The President has read your telegram, and directs me to suggest that, if the enemy had more occupation south of the river, his cavalry would not be so likely to make raids north of it.”<sup>106</sup> Shortly thereafter, Lincoln more pointedly wired the Young Napoleon: “I have just received your dispatch about sore tongued and fatigued horses. Will you pardon me for asking what the horses of your army have done since the battle of Antietam that fatigue anything?”<sup>107</sup> Indignant at what he considered a “dirty little fling,” McClellan sent a lengthy report on his cavalry but failed to deal with Lincoln’s larger point, that the army’s inactivity threatened the war effort.<sup>108</sup>

Lincoln tried to sooth the general’s hurt feelings. “Most certainly I intend no injustice to any; and if I have done any, I deeply regret it. To be told after more than five weeks total inaction of the Army, and during which period we had sent to that Army every fresh horse we possibly could, amounting in the whole to 7918 that the cavalry

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<sup>104</sup> Halleck to McClellan, Washington, 6 October 1862, OR, I, 19:6.

<sup>105</sup> Halleck to Elizabeth Hamilton Halleck, Washington, 7 October 1862, Schoff Civil War Collection, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>106</sup> Halleck to McClellan, Washington, 14 October 1862, OR, I, 19:421.

<sup>107</sup> Lincoln to McClellan, Washington, 25 October 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:474.

<sup>108</sup> Stephen W. Sears, George B. McClellan: The Young Napoleon (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1988), 334. Meigs denied that McClellan reported accurately on the number of good horses available to him.

horses were too much fatigued to move, presented a very cheerless, almost hopeless, prospect for the future; and it may have forced something of impatience into my despatches. If not recruited, and rested then, when could they ever be?”<sup>109</sup>

While McClellan dithered, Jeb Stuart’s 1800 Confederate cavalrymen once again rode a circle around the Army of the Potomac. Nicolay told his fiancée that Stuart’s joyride was “a little thing, accomplishing not much actual harm, and yet infinitely vexatious and mischievous. The President has well-nigh lost his temper over it.”<sup>110</sup> With some asperity Lincoln remarked to McClellan that “Stuart’s cavalry outmarched ours, having certainly done more marked service on the Peninsula, and everywhere since.”<sup>111</sup>

The Congress and Cabinet shared the president’s impatience with McClellan. “His slow trench digging defensive tactics will not do,” Caleb B. Smith wrote in late September. “He has already done more to give strength & vigor to the rebellion than Jeff Davis.” The quasi-victory at Antietam “is fruitless except of slaughter to our troops.” Little Mac’s failure to capture even one gun or one wagon from the retreating Lee was, Smith believed, “proof of either treachery or imbecility.”<sup>112</sup> Zachariah Chandler confided that he was “becoming discouraged and disheartened” by the “unaccountable delay in the movement of the Army.” He told his wife that “[s]omething must be done or we are lost.”<sup>113</sup> The public too was growing disenchanted. “We hate & abhor this milk & water

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<sup>109</sup> Lincoln to McClellan, Washington, 27 October 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:479.

<sup>110</sup> Nicolay to Theren Bates, Washington, 13 October 1862, in Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 89.

<sup>111</sup> Lincoln to McClellan, Washington, 26 October 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:477.

<sup>112</sup> Smith to Thurlow Weed, Washington, 29 September 1862, Weed Papers, University of Rochester.

<sup>113</sup> Chandler to his wife, Washington, 10 December 1862, Chandler Papers, Library of Congress.



course at Washington,” groused a constituent of Chandler. “It invites attack & sustains our domestic enemies.”<sup>114</sup>

On October 13, the president bluntly criticized McClellan for his timidity. “You remember my speaking to you of what I called your over-cautiousness. Are you not over-cautious when you assume that you can not do what the enemy is constantly doing? Should you not claim to be at least his equal in prowess, and act upon the claim?” To McClellan’s insistence that he needed to have the rail line from Harper’s Ferry repaired before he could move against Lee’s army at Winchester, Lincoln replied: “I certainly should be pleased for you to have the advantage of the Railroad from Harper's Ferry to Winchester, but it wastes all the remainder of autumn to give it to you; and, in fact ignores the question of time, which can not, and must not be ignored.”

Little Mac had expressed fear that while his army moved toward Winchester, the Confederates might attack Pennsylvania. To alleviate this anxiety, Lincoln pointed out that if Lee “does so in full force, he gives up his communications to you absolutely, and you have nothing to do but to follow, and ruin him; if he does so with less than full force, fall upon, and beat what is left behind all the easier.” The Army of the Potomac, Lincoln noted, was closer to Richmond than was the Army of Northern Virginia. “Why can you not reach there before him, unless you admit that he is more than your equal on a march. His route is the arc of a circle, while yours is the chord. The roads are as good on yours as on his.” If Lee moved toward the Confederate capital, Lincoln suggested that McClellan “press closely to him, fight him if a favorable opportunity should present, and, at least,

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<sup>114</sup> Willet Raynor to Zachariah Chandler, Burr Oak, Michigan, 4 December 1862, Chandler Papers, Library of Congress.

try to beat him to Richmond on the inside track. I say 'try'; if we never try, we shall never succeed.”

If Lee stayed put at Winchester, Lincoln urged, the Army of the Potomac should “fight him there, on the idea that if we can not beat him when he bears the wastage of coming to us, we never can when we bear the wastage of going to him. This proposition is a simple truth, and is too important to be lost sight of for a moment. In coming to us, he tenders us an advantage which we should not waive. We should not so operate as to merely drive him away. As we must beat him somewhere, or fail finally, we can do it, if at all, easier near to us, than far away. If we can not beat the enemy where he now is, we never can, he again being within the entrenchments of Richmond.” After describing how the Union army could be easily supplied as it moved toward the Confederate capital, Lincoln assured Little Mac that his letter was “in no sense an order.”<sup>115</sup>

Lincoln feared that this admonition would have little effect, even though it implicitly gave McClellan only one last chance to redeem himself. In conversation he “seemed to doubt that George would move after all” and added that “he’d got tired of his excuses” and “he’d remove him at once but for the election.”<sup>116</sup> Reluctantly, Little Mac abandoned his intention to postpone serious action until the spring. Still he dawdled. On October 21, Halleck told him that the president “does not expect impossibilities, but he is very anxious that all this good weather should not be wasted in inactivity.”<sup>117</sup> To a congressman who asked when the Army of the Potomac would move, Lincoln replied:

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<sup>115</sup> Lincoln to McClellan, Washington, 13 October 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:460-61.

<sup>116</sup> Adams S. Hill to Sydney Howard Gay, Washington, 13 October 1862, in Louis Morris Starr, Bohemian Brigade: Civil War Newsmen in Action (New York: Knopf, 1954), 152.

<sup>117</sup> OR, I, 19:81.

“Gen. McClellan knows I wish him to move on at the first practicable moment. When he will do so you know as well as I!”<sup>118</sup>

Chase was also very anxious, for McClellan’s inactivity made it difficult to raise money. Exasperated, the treasury secretary urged Jay Cooke to inform Lincoln that Little Mac must be replaced in order to expedite bond sales. In late October, Cooke visited the president at the Soldiers’ Home. “I told him of my struggles to maintain the credit of the Nation and to provide, from popular sales, for the enormous daily demands for cash,” Cooke recalled. He explained “that in spite of every effort, the gloom was increasing and the sales declining, and that the people and myself felt that unless McClellan was sent away very soon, no one could foretell the future.” Lincoln’s response indicated, as Cooke remembered, “that my request was appreciated.”<sup>119</sup>

As Lincoln struggled to decide whether to fire McClellan or retain him, a sympathetic observer thought “the president might be likened to a boy carrying a basket of eggs. Couldn’t let go his basket to unbutton his breeches – was in great distress from a necessity to urinate – and stood crying ‘What shall I do?’”<sup>120</sup>

On October 26, Little Mac finally began marching his army across the Potomac, a process lasting more than a week. “The President keeps poking sharp sticks under little Mac’s ribs, and has screwed up his courage to the point of beginning to cross the river

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<sup>118</sup> Washington correspondence, 3 November, National Anti-Slavery Standard (New York), 8 November 1862.

<sup>119</sup> Cooke, “Interview with Lincoln,” reminiscences written in 1890, American History Illustrated 7 (1972): 10-11.

<sup>120</sup> Diary of William T. Coggeshall, 23 October 1862, in Freda Postle Koch, Colonel Coggeshall: The Man Who Saved Lincoln (Columbus, Ohio: Poko Press, 1985), 69.

today,” Nicolay wrote Hay on October 26.<sup>121</sup> Intemperately McClellan complained to his wife: “If you could know the mean & dirty character of the dispatches I receive you would boil over with anger – when it is possible to misunderstand, & when it is not possible, whenever there is a chance of a wretched innuendo – there it comes. But the good of the country requires me to submit to all this from men whom I know to be greatly my inferiors socially, intellectually & morally! There never was a truer epithet applied to a certain individual than that of the ‘Gorilla.’”<sup>122</sup>

As the Army of the Potomac moved south at a leisurely pace, Lee swiftly retreated toward Richmond. On November 4, the Confederates were positioned athwart its line of advance. Finally out of all patience with McClellan, Lincoln fired him. He had been tempted to do so earlier, but told a friend that “there was a question about the effect of [McClellan’s] removal before the election.”<sup>123</sup> He said he wished not “to estrange the affections of the Democratic party,” nor did he want to make the general a martyr.<sup>124</sup> By early November, Nicolay reported, Lincoln’s “patience is at last completely exhausted with McClellan’s inaction and never-ending excuses.” The president “has been exceedingly reluctant to do this. In many respects he thinks McClellan a very superior and efficient officer. This with the high personal regard for him, has led him to indulge him in his whims and complaints and shortcomings as a mother would indulge her baby.

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<sup>121</sup> Nicolay to Hay, Washington, 26 October 1862, in Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 90.

<sup>122</sup> Sears, ed., McClellan Papers, 515.

<sup>123</sup> John A. Jones to David Davis, Georgetown, D.C., 27 October 1862, Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>124</sup> Washington correspondence, 3 November, New York Tribune, 9 November 1862.

He is constitutionally too slow, and has fitly been dubbed the great American tortoise.”<sup>125</sup>

(He was also known as the “Great Do-nothing,” the “peatland turtle,” and “Fabius McClellan Cunctator.”)<sup>126</sup>

To Francis P. Blair, Lincoln explained that he “had tried long enough to bore with an auger too dull to take hold.” He added: “I said I would remove him if he let Lee’s army get away from him, and I must do so. He has got the ‘slows,’ Mr. Blair.” He also told Blair that McClellan’s subordinate generals had lost confidence in him.<sup>127</sup> Similarly, he explained to Orville H. Browning that he had “coaxed, urged, and ordered” McClellan to move aggressively, “but all would not do. At the expiration of two weeks after a peremptory order to that effect, he had only three-fourths of his army across the river and was six days doing that, whereas the rebel army had effected a crossing in one day.”<sup>128</sup>

The president offered another account to John Hay: “After the battle of Antietam, I went up to the field to try to get him to move & came back thinking he would move at once. But when I got home he began to argue why he ought not to move. I peremptorily ordered him to advance. It was 19 days before he put a man over the river. It was 9 days longer before he got his army across and then he stopped again, delaying on little pretexts of wanting this and that. I began to fear he was playing false — that he did not want to hurt the enemy. I saw how he could intercept the enemy on the way to Richmond. I

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<sup>125</sup> Nicolay to Theresia Bates, Washington, 9 November 1862, in Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 90-91.

<sup>126</sup> Joseph L. Maguire to N. P. Banks, New York, 11 November 1862, Banks Papers, Library of Congress; Chase to Timothy C. Day, Washington, 24 February 1862, in Sarah J. Day, The Man on a Hill Top (Philadelphia: Ware Brothers, 1931), 259; Victor Faide to John A. Andrew, New York, 28 August 1864, Andrew Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>127</sup> Francis P. Blair, Sr. to Francis P. Blair, Jr., 7 November 1862, Blair Family Papers, Library of Congress; Francis P. Blair, Sr., to Montgomery Blair, 2 March 1863, ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Pease and Randall, eds., Browning Diary, 1:590 (entry for 29 November 1862).

determined to make that the test. If he let them get away I would remove him. He did so & I relieved him.”<sup>129</sup> Lincoln’s suspicion that McClellan “did not want to hurt the enemy” is easy to understand, given the general’s timidity, but it was unjustified; McClellan desired military success but lacked the boldness to achieve it.<sup>130</sup>

Lincoln’s good friend Anson G. Henry astutely judged that if McClellan had carried out the plan described in the president’s October 13 letter, the general could have won a significant victory and “would have been a great Hero, for Mr Lincoln would have never claimed the Glory.”<sup>131</sup>

Lincoln’s futile efforts to spur McClellan to act reminded him of a story: “I was not more successful than the blacksmith in our town, in my boyhood days, when he tried to put to a useful purpose a big piece of wrought-iron that was in the shop. He heated it up, put it on the anvil, and said: ‘I’m going to make a sledge-hammer out of you.’ After a while he stopped hammering it, looked at it, and remarked: ‘Guess I’ve drawn you out a little to fine for a sledge-hammer; reckon I’d better make a clevis of you.’ He stuck it in the fire, blew the bellows, got up a good heat, then began shaping the iron again on the anvil. Pretty soon he stopped, sized it up with his eye, and said: ‘Guess I’ve drawn you out too thin for a clevis; suppose I better make a clevis-bolt of you.’ He put it in the fire. Bore down still harder on the bellows, drew out the iron, and went to work at it once more on the anvil. In a few minutes he stopped, took a look, and exclaimed: ‘Well, now I’ve got you a leettle too thin even to make a clevis-bolt out of you.’ Then he rammed it in the fire again, threw his whole weight on top of the bellows, got up a white heat on the

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<sup>129</sup> Burlingame and Ettliger, eds., Hay Diary, 232 (entry for 25 September 1864).

<sup>130</sup> Sears, McClellan, 339.

<sup>131</sup> Henry to his wife, Washington, 12 April 1863, Henry Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

iron, jerked it out, carried it in the tongs to the water-barrel, held it over the barrel, and cried: ‘I’ve tried to make a sledge-hammer of you, and failed; I’ve tried to make a clevis of you, and failed; I’ve tried to make a clevis-bolt of you, and failed; now, darn you, I’m going to make a fizzle of you’; and with that he soused it in the water and let it fizz.”<sup>132</sup>

McClellan’s chief engineer, John G. Barnard, agreed with Lincoln about Little Mac. “If you were to ‘count noses’ among the officers of the A[rmy of the] P[otomac] whose opinions are worth any thing,” Barnard told Senator John Sherman in January 1863, “I believe you would find that most think and express the opinion that he made the most stupendous failure. He showed himself incapable in the outset of appreciating & grasping his position by utterly failing to do anything – permitting the Potomac to be blockaded in face of his 25000 men – Norfolk to be kept – until he lost the essential requisite to success – the confidence of the Administration and of the Country.” Barnard judged that “History records few such opportunities of greatness offered – and so stupendously . . . lost.”<sup>133</sup> A judicious biographer of McClellan deemed him “inarguably the worst” of the many generals who headed the Army of the Potomac.<sup>134</sup>

Lincoln’s decision came as a pleasant surprise to some observers. A Washington correspondent astutely remarked that “it required immense courage on his part to do it. It may not seem so to a quiet, stay-at-home body, far from the centre of political and military movements, but here no intelligent man could fail to perceive that it required

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<sup>132</sup> Horace Porter, Campaigning with Grant (New York: Century, 1897), 415.

<sup>133</sup> J. G. Barnard to [John Sherman], Washington, 6 January 1863 [misdated 1862], John Sherman Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>134</sup> Sears, McClellan, xii.

great moral courage in the President,” for McClellan had many powerful friends and admirers.<sup>135</sup>

McClellan’s dismissal was a response to the elections. Lincoln interpreted the negative results as the voters’ demand for “a more vigorous prosecution of the war.”<sup>136</sup> On November 13, he told Senator Zachariah Chandler of Michigan that the “war shall henceforth be prosecuted with tremendous energy. The country could afford to wait no longer. The government must and shall prosecute the war to a conclusion.”<sup>137</sup>

Twelve days later, however, Chandler’s colleague Lyman Trumbull spoke with Lincoln for an hour and came away somewhat skeptical. “Mr. Lincoln’s intentions as you and I both know,” Trumbull told William Butler, “have always been right, but he has lacked the will to carry them out. I think he means to act, with more vigor hereafter, but whether he will be able to do so as at present surrounded is perhaps doubtful.” When the Illinois senator speculated that Grant would “clean out the South West if let alone from Washington,” the president “replied that he would be let alone except to be urged forward.” The same policy would apply to William S. Rosecrans.<sup>138</sup>

(David Davis reported that “Lincoln has no doubt that Judge Trumbull is not his friend.”<sup>139</sup> In 1861, the senator had criticized Lincoln for not having “confidence in

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<sup>135</sup> Washington correspondence, 9, 16 November, National Anti-Slavery Standard (New York), 15, 22 November 1862.

<sup>136</sup> Washington correspondence, 11 November, New York Tribune, 14 November 1862.

<sup>137</sup> Lincoln reportedly told this to Chandler on November 13. Washington correspondence, 14 November, New York Evening Post, 15 November 1862.

<sup>138</sup> Trumbull to Butler, Washington, 26 November 1862, Butler Papers, Chicago History Museum.

<sup>139</sup> David Davis to Leonard Swett, Lenox, Massachusetts, 26 November 1862, Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.



himself and the will necessary in this great emergency.”<sup>140</sup> Many years later he rendered a similar judgment: “as President during a great civil war he lacked executive ability, and that resolution and prompt action essential to bring it to a speedy and successful close.”<sup>141</sup> Trumbull fought against Lincoln’s assertion that the president, rather than Congress, had the power to suspend the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus. In debates over the Second Confiscation Act, Trumbull had virtually accused Lincoln of acting tyrannically.<sup>142</sup> In reply, Senator James Dixon of Connecticut declared: “The Senator from Illinois has, at last, unmasked himself as an opponent of this Administration. . . . I have thought for some time that he was an opponent of the Administration.”<sup>143</sup>

Abolitionists and Radicals cheered the president for dismissing McClellan. Elizur Wright found it hard to express “the sense of relief, not to say joy, it gives me to see the government at least beginning to displace commanders that have used, and nearly used up, our armies helping the rebels,” and Indiana Governor Oliver P. Morton thought that McClellan’s removal “has taken a load off the heart of the nation, and the pulse once again beats high.”<sup>144</sup> Reflecting on Republican losses at the polls, Horace White said that since “the effect of the election has been to rid the country of that moral & military incubus Geo[rge] B. McClellan I will not regret it.”<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Trumbull to M. Carey Lea, Washington, 5 November 1861, Horace White, The Life of Lyman Trumbull (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), 171.

<sup>141</sup> Trumbull to his son Walter, n.p., n.d., in White, Trumbull, 430.

<sup>142</sup> White, Trumbull, 190-209.

<sup>143</sup> Congressional Globe, 37<sup>th</sup> Congress, 3<sup>rd</sup> session, 2973.

<sup>144</sup> Wright to Chase, Boston, 13 November 1862, in Philip G. Wright and Elizabeth Q. Wright, Elizur Wright: The Father of Life Insurance (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937), 217; Morton to Yates, Indianapolis, 13 November 1862, L. U. Reavis Papers, Chicago History Museum.

<sup>145</sup> Horace White to William Butler, Chicago, 11 November 1862, Butler Papers, Chicago History Museum.

McClellan was not the only important general lacking boldness; Don Carlos Buell, like the Young Napoleon, had case of the “slows” and favored a “soft war” policy. He thought like a hidebound adjutant general rather than an aggressive field commander.<sup>146</sup> When Confederates under Braxton Bragg invaded Kentucky in the summer of 1862, Buell forsook his Chattanooga campaign in order to defend Louisville and Cincinnati. Panicky Ohio Republicans implored Lincoln to send reinforcements to protect the Queen City. “I have no regiments to put there. The fact is I do not carry any regiments in my trousers pocket,” he impatiently snapped.<sup>147</sup>

Much to the dismay of the North, Bragg captured 8,000 troops at two garrisons. Moreover, Buell had come within ten miles of Bragg’s army at Munfordsville, Kentucky, but failed to attack. Disenchanted with Buell, Lincoln on September 24 decided to replace him with George H. Thomas, who had won the battle of Mill Springs, Kentucky, in January. Thomas, however, refused, maintaining that Buell was closing on the enemy and should not be removed. When Kentucky Congressmen John J. Crittenden and Charles A. Wickliffe, who were grateful to Buell for saving Louisville, protested, an embarrassed Lincoln suspended the order while intimating that Buell “must win his spurs if he would continue to wear them.”<sup>148</sup>

Goaded by the president, Buell stepped up his pursuit of Bragg and fought him at Perryville, Kentucky, on October 8. When the Rebels withdrew into Tennessee, Buell

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<sup>146</sup> Stephen D. Engle, Don Carlos Buell: Most Promising of All (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 313.

<sup>147</sup> These remarks were directed to John Palmer Usher, Ohio Governor William Dennison, Lars Anderson, and Congressman John A. Gurley. Reminiscences of Usher, unidentified clipping, scrapbook no. 1, Otto Eisenschiml Papers, University of Iowa.

<sup>148</sup> Adams S. Hill to Sydney Howard Gay, [Washington, late September or early October 1862], Gay Papers, Columbia University; Washington correspondence, 9 October, New York Tribune, 10 October 1862.

failed to chase them vigorously and instead returned to Nashville.<sup>149</sup> He could not follow the Confederates, he said, because they had entered an area where it would difficult to supply his army. Remarking on Buell's inertia, Nicolay sarcastically observed that it "is rather a good thing to be a Major General and in command of a Department. One can take things so leisurely!"<sup>150</sup> In the same vein, Chase remarked that the planet earth was "a body of considerable magnitude – but moves faster than Gen. Buell."<sup>151</sup>

The exasperated president, always eager to aid the Unionists of East Tennessee, had Halleck order Buell to move against Chattanooga once again: "You say it is the heart of the enemy's resources, make it the heart of yours . . . . Your army must enter East Tennessee this fall and . . . it ought to move there while the roads are passable. Once between the enemy and Nashville, there will be no serious difficulty in reopening your communications with that place. He [Lincoln] does not understand why we cannot march as the enemy marches, live as he lives, and fight as he fights, unless we admit the inferiority of our troops and of our generals."<sup>152</sup> Lincoln, mystified by general's failure to move, "was down on Buell as worse than a slow man."<sup>153</sup>

When Buell contended that his troops were not as highly motivated as the enemy's, the president on October 24 replaced him with hard-drinking, hot-tempered, excitable William S. Rosecrans of Ohio, much to the delight of the Western governors

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<sup>149</sup> Kenneth W. Noe, "'Grand Havoc': The Climactic Battle of Perryville," in Kent Masterson Brown, ed., The Civil War in Kentucky (Mason City, IA: Savas, 2000), 175-204.

<sup>150</sup> Nicolay to Therenia Bates, Washington, 16 October 1862, in Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 89.

<sup>151</sup> John Niven, ed., The Salmon P. Chase Papers (5 vols.; Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1993-1998), 3:294-95.

<sup>152</sup> O.R., I, 16, 2: 626-27.

<sup>153</sup> John A. Jones to David Davis, Georgetown, D.C., 27 October 1862, Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

who had been clamoring for Buell's dismissal. Though the industrious Rosecrans had recently shown vigor in battles at Iuka and Corinth, Mississippi, it is hard to understand why Lincoln did not try once again to appoint George H. Thomas to replace Buell. Thomas outranked Rosecrans and was a far more gifted general.<sup>154</sup> Stanton recommended him, but the war secretary's advice was outweighed by that of Halleck and Chase, a fellow Ohioan. Old Brains told Rosecrans, reflecting Lincoln's view, that the "time has now come when we must apply the sterner rules of war, whenever such application becomes necessary, to enable us to support our armies and to move them rapidly upon the enemy. You will not hesitate to do this in all cases where the exigencies of the war require it. . . . Neither the country nor the Government will much longer put up with the inactivity of some of our armies and generals."<sup>155</sup>

The appointment of Rosecrans came too late to affect the October elections in Indiana and Pennsylvania. After the votes were in, the president expressed regret that he had not replaced Buell earlier.<sup>156</sup>

Meanwhile, Old Rosy dithered in Nashville, and the president by late November lost patience with him.<sup>157</sup> Halleck informed the general that Lincoln was "greatly dissatisfied" and "has repeatedly told me time and again that there were imperative reasons why the enemy should be driven across the Tennessee River at the

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<sup>154</sup> T. Harry Williams, Lincoln and His Generals (New York: Knopf, 1952), 185-87.

<sup>155</sup> OR, I, 16, 2:643; 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), 153.

<sup>156</sup> Washington correspondence, 21 October, Cincinnati Gazette, 22 October 1862; Washington correspondence, 22 October, New York Tribune, 23 October 1862.

<sup>157</sup> Lyman Trumbull to William Butler, Washington, 26 November 1862, Butler Papers, Chicago History Museum.

earliest possible moment.”<sup>158</sup> The general-in-chief warned Rosecrans that twice already “I have been asked to designate someone else to command your army. If you remain one more week at Nashville, I cannot prevent your removal. . . . The Government demands action.”<sup>159</sup> But the headstrong, argumentative Rosecrans stayed put until December 26, when he finally moved to expel Braxton Bragg’s army from central Tennessee.

#### CONTROLLING THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER

Lincoln also appointed another general to an important command in the West, John A. McClernand, his old political opponent from Illinois. In September, McClernand had proposed to recruit an army with which he would capture Vicksburg and seize control of the Mississippi. Eager to have prominent Democrats support the war and raise troops, especially in his own state, Lincoln gave the scheme his blessing, for he believed that the Mississippi was “the backbone of the Rebellion” and “the key to the whole situation.” The war, he said, “can never be brought to a close until that key is in our pocket.”<sup>160</sup> Since the campaign against the Confederate citadel would involve both the army and the navy, Lincoln summoned Admiral David Dixon Porter and asked his advice about naming a general to command it. When Porter suggested Grant or Sherman, Lincoln replied that McClernand would be “the very person for the business.” After calling on McClernand at the president’s suggestion, Porter concluded that he was foolish and promptly departed for Illinois without reporting back to the White House. In a memoir, Porter declared: “I do not suppose that so great a piece of folly was ever before

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<sup>158</sup> Marszelek, Halleck, 159.

<sup>159</sup> Halleck to Rosecrans, Washington, 4 December 1862, OR, I, 1, 1:20, 2:118.

<sup>160</sup> William L. Shea and Terrence J. Winschel, Vicksburg is the Key: The Struggle for the Mississippi River (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 1.

committed” as the appointment of McClernand.<sup>161</sup> Halleck and Stanton shared Porter’s view.<sup>162</sup> They were right.

In fact, Lincoln had some reservations about McClernand; he told Chase that the general was “brave and capable, but too desirous to be independent of everybody.”<sup>163</sup> That drawback would cause serious complications. Yet in December he declared that he wanted the general to command the expedition and pledged to sustain, strengthen, and stand by him.<sup>164</sup>

In December, Lincoln alluded to the McClernand plan, saying “that the whole energies of the Government were now devoted to opening the Mississippi river.”<sup>165</sup> To expedite that plan, Lincoln decided to replace Benjamin F. Butler, who had been in charge at New Orleans since David Farragut had captured it in April. Butler caused problems for Union diplomacy by antagonizing foreign consuls in the Crescent City. In addition, his heavy-handed tactics in dealing with the local population, as well as his rumored corruption, had discouraged the growth of Unionist sentiment in Louisiana. Earlier Butler had exasperated Lincoln by quarreling with Massachusetts Governor John A. Andrew about recruiting in the Bay State.<sup>166</sup> (Apropos of this controversy, the president remarked that “Butler was cross eyed and he supposed he didn’t see things as

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<sup>161</sup> David Dixon Porter, “Journal of Occurrences during the War of the Rebellion,” 1:389-92, 416, Porter Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>162</sup> Thomas Ewing, Sr., to his son, Thomas Ewing, Jr., Washington, 8 February 1863. Ewing Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>163</sup> Niven, ed., Chase Papers, 1:403 (diary entry for 27 September 1862).

<sup>164</sup> Browning to McClernand, Washington, 2 December 1862, McClernand Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. Lincoln told Browning this on December 2. Browning did not mention this conversation in this diary.

<sup>165</sup> Washington correspondence, 10 December, Cincinnati Gazette, 11 December 1862.

<sup>166</sup> John M. Hamrogue, “John A. Andrew, Abolitionist Governor, 1861-1865” (PhD dissertation, Fordham University, 1974), 123-31; Richard S. West, Jr., Lincoln’s Scapegoat General: A Life of Benjamin F. Butler, 1818-1893 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 111-18, 186-204.

other people did.”)<sup>167</sup> When the president met the governor’s wife in January 1862, he asked: “Well, how does your Husband & Butler get on – has the Governor commissioned those men yet?”

When Mrs. Andrew hesitated, her escort replied: “We are informed Sir that you have commissioned them.”

“No,” said Lincoln, “but I am getting mad with the Governor & Butler both.”

When Mrs. Andrew remarked that the president did not appear especially angry, he replied: “No, I don’t ever get fighting mad, no how.”<sup>168</sup>

The president explained to a young lieutenant why he had long hesitated to move against Butler: “I don’t know what to do with General Butler. He gives me more trouble than any general in the army; and yet should I deprive him of command, I should have the State of Massachusetts and the whole of New England down upon me.”<sup>169</sup>

Lincoln had to worry about Radical Republicans throughout the country, not just in New England. They admired the Massachusetts general’s “contraband” policy and his recruitment of black troops in Louisiana.<sup>170</sup> When Illinois Congressman Isaac N. Arnold complained about the removal of Butler from command, Lincoln gently urged his old friend to be more understanding: “I am compelled to take a more impartial and unprejudiced view of things. Without claiming to be your superior, which I do not, my

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<sup>167</sup> Lincoln said this to Massachusetts Attorney General Dwight Foster. Henry Lee, Jr., to John A. Andrew, Washington, 5 November 1861, George Bancroft Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>168</sup> Frank E. Howe to John A. Andrew, Washington, 23 January 1862, Andrew Papers Massachusetts Historical Society. Howe, who was Mrs. Andrew’s escort, said “these were his precise words.” Mrs. Andrew gave a slightly different version of this colloquy to Sydney Howard Gay who in turn related it to Josephine Shaw Lowell. Josephine Shaw Lowell diary, 3 April 1862 in William Rinelander Stewart, The Philanthropic Work of Josephine Shaw Lowell (New York: Macmillan, 1911), 23.

<sup>169</sup> David Edward Cronin, The Evolution of a Life (New York: S. W. Green’s Son, 1884), 232. The lieutenant was Charles W. Butts, who is the source of these presidential remarks.

<sup>170</sup> Hans L. Trefousse, The Radical Republicans: Lincoln’s Vanguard for Racial Justice (New York: Knopf, 1969), 242-44.

position enables me to understand my duty in all these matters better than you possibly can, and I hope you do not yet doubt my integrity.”<sup>171</sup>

In response to popular pressure, Lincoln offered to restore Butler to command in New Orleans; the general, however, balked because the department had too few troops. When Butler asked why more could not be provided, Lincoln reportedly answered: “We haven’t them to give.”

“Then why don’t you raise more – put the draft in New York! – raise that forty thousand who should have been raised in that state last fall!”

“Mr. Seymour says it will not do to draft in New York.”

“Then I would draft Seymour!” Butler exclaimed.<sup>172</sup>

As the president and his advisors considered alternative assignments for him, Butler grew impatient and finally “told them all to go to h[ell]” and returned to Massachusetts.<sup>173</sup>

To take Butler’s place, Lincoln chose another Massachusetts politico, Nathaniel P. Banks, who was informed by Halleck that the president “regards the opening of the Mississippi river as the first and most important of all our military & naval operations, and it is hoped that you will not lose a moment in accomplishing it.”<sup>174</sup> Controlling the

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<sup>171</sup> Lincoln to Isaac N. Arnold, Washington, 26 May 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:230-31.

<sup>172</sup> Washington correspondence by Van [D. W. Bartlett], 11 February, Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 13 February 1863.

<sup>173</sup> Col. John Wesley Turner to Adam Badeau, New York, 12 March 1863, Schoff Civil War Collection, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>174</sup> Halleck to Banks, Washington, 8 November 1862, Banks Papers, Library of Congress. In August, Lincoln had asked John A. Dix to replace Butler, but Dix declined. Thomas Cottman to Thurlow Weed, Baltimore, 17 September 1862, Weed Papers, University of Rochester.



Father of Waters, said the general-in-chief, “is worth to us forty Richmonds.”<sup>175</sup> The administration decided to focus on the river partly in response to the electoral setbacks of the fall. Indiana Governor Oliver P. Morton warned Lincoln the “fate of the North-West is trembling in the balance. The result of the late elections admonishes all who understand its import that not an hour is to be lost.” The region, so dependent on the commercial artery of the Mississippi, might decide to cast its lot with the South.<sup>176</sup>

Confederate fortresses at Vicksburg, Mississippi, and Port Hudson, Louisiana, posed the main obstacle to securing the Mississippi. Lincoln envisioned a three-pronged campaign: from New Orleans, Banks would move north toward Port Hudson; McClernand would move south toward Vicksburg; and a fleet of gunboats under Admiral David Dixon Porter would attack Confederate strongholds along the river. Where Grant would fit into the scheme was unclear. The failure of Lincoln and Stanton to consult with Halleck and Grant about this campaign laid the groundwork for later confusion, for it was unclear just who would be in overall charge.

Grant should have been given command of this campaign, for he was a professional soldier who had achieved significant victories. Halleck objected to political generals like Banks and McClernand, complaining that “political power over-rules all military considerations.” To General James B. McPherson, Old Brains lamented: “How long the president will submit to this dictation is uncertain. He must either put it down, or it will sink him so low that the last trump of Gabriel will never reach his ears!”<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Halleck to Banks, Washington, 11 May 1863, OR, I, 15:276.

<sup>176</sup> Morton to Lincoln, Indianapolis, 27 October 1862, William Dudley Foulke, Life of Oliver P. Morton, Including His Important Speeches (2 vols.; Indianapolis: Bowen-Merrill, 1899), 1:208-211.

<sup>177</sup> Marszelek, Halleck, 169.

## DEFENDING HIMSELF: ANALYZING POLITICAL REVERSES

Other factors aside from military stalemate contributed to the Republican reverses at the polls that fall, most notably the president's September 24 proclamation suspending the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus nationwide, thus empowering the military to arrest civilians who discouraged enlistments, resisted the Militia Draft, or were "guilty of any disloyal practice." Along with the Emancipation Proclamation, the suspension of habeas corpus provided the Democrats with their most effective ammunition during the election campaign. John W. Forney had warned "altho' the President's two last proclamations have aroused the wildest feelings of enthusiasm among our true friends, yet at the same time they increase the responsibilities and dangers of the administration. The Federal power must be felt at once in every Congressional district in the loyal states or we may lose the next House of Representatives."<sup>178</sup>

Even some Republicans objected. Henry Winter Davis said the suspension of habeas corpus instituted "court martial despotism."<sup>179</sup> Republican members of Congress from the Midwest, however, thought it "quite as important and immediately helpful in the suppression of the rebellion as the proclamation of freedom."<sup>180</sup>

Lincoln was widely blamed for the party's dismal showing.<sup>181</sup> "It is hard to say a hard word of your friends, but it is the simple truth that the President is responsible for

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<sup>178</sup> Forney to Chase, Philadelphia, 26 September 1862, Chase Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

<sup>179</sup> Henry Winter Davis to Sophie Du Pont, [Baltimore], 24 September 1862, transcript, S. F. Du Pont Papers, Hagley Museum, Wilmington, Delaware.

<sup>180</sup> Washington correspondence, 26 September, New York Tribune, 27 September 1862.

<sup>181</sup> Winfred A. Harbison, "The Election of 1862 as a Want of Confidence in President Lincoln," Papers of the Michigan Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, 1930, 499-513.

the political disasters in the West,” remarked the National Anti-Slavery Standard.<sup>182</sup> In an editorial titled “The Vote of Want of Confidence,” the New York Times declared that the “very qualities which have made Abraham Lincoln so well liked in private life – his trustful disposition, his kindheartedness, his concern for fair play, his placidity of temper – in a manner unfit him for the stern requirements of deadly war. Quick, sharp, summary dealings don’t suit him at all. He is all the while haunted with the fear of doing some injustice, and is ever easy to accept explanations.” He lacked “the old Jacksonian passion” and “the high sacred vehemence, inspired by the consciousness of infinite interests at stake, and infinite responsibilities.” The people demand that he end the “indecision and procrastination and general feebleness which, from the beginning thus far, have marked military operations, for which he is ultimately responsible.”<sup>183</sup> George Bancroft denounced Lincoln as “ignorant, self-willed” and “surrounded by men, some of whom are as ignorant as himself.”<sup>184</sup> Among those close to Lincoln who came in for the most vigorous censure were the heads of both military and civilian departments. “As a whole, the Cabinet has been a sad failure, and so has been our generalship,” remarked Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper. “And when the people voted, or declined to vote, they did so as much in opposition to the one as the other.”<sup>185</sup>

Carl Schurz scolded the president, alleging that the “defeat of the Administration is the Administration’s own fault” because it “placed the Army, now a great power in this Republic, into the hands of its enemy’s.” Democratic generals, unenthusiastic about the

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<sup>182</sup> Washington correspondence, 20 October, National Anti-Slavery Standard (New York), 25 October 1862.

<sup>183</sup> New York Times, 7 November 1862.

<sup>184</sup> Bancroft to Francis Lieber, 29 October 1862, Lieber Papers, in Howard, Religion and the Radical Republican Movement, 46.

<sup>185</sup> Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, 22 November 1862.

war's aims, had failed to deliver victories. "Let us be commanded by generals whose heart is in the war, and only by such," Schurz urged. "Let every general who does not show himself strong enough to command success, be deposed at once. Let every trust of power be accompanied by a corresponding responsibility, and all may be well yet."<sup>186</sup> (In fact, McClellan and Buell both disliked emancipation. In a general order to his troops, Little Mac expressed no approval for the president's act. Instead, he hinted that the Republicans should be punished at election time: "The remedy for political errors, if any are committed, is to be found only in the action of the people at the polls."<sup>187</sup> Buell thought liberated slaves would prove a military nuisance.)<sup>188</sup>

Lincoln, after being barraged by numerous critics making points like Schurz's, took that general's letter as the occasion to reply to them all.<sup>189</sup> He argued that three factors caused the Republican setback: "1. The democrats were left in a majority by our friends going to the war. 2. The democrats observed this & determined to re-instate themselves in power, and 3. Our newspaper's, by vilifying and disparaging the administration, furnished them all the weapons to do it with. Certainly, the ill-success of the war had much to do with this."

The president explained why he had distributed military patronage to Democrats: "It so happened that very few of our friends had a military education or were of the profession of arms. It would have been a question whether the war should be conducted on military knowledge, or on political affinity, only that our own friends (I think Mr.

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<sup>186</sup> Schurz to Lincoln, New Baltimore, Virginia, 8 November 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>187</sup> OR, I, 19, 2: 395-96.

<sup>188</sup> Engle, Buell, 31.

<sup>189</sup> "What the Country Asks of the President," New York Tribune, 22 October 1862; Schurz, Reminiscences, 2:396.

Schurz included) seemed to think that such a question was inadmissable. Accordingly I have scarcely appointed a democrat to a command, who was not urged by many republicans and opposed by none. It was so as to McClellan. He was first brought forward by the Republican Governor of Ohio, & claimed, and contended for at the same time by the Republican Governor of Pennsylvania. I received recommendations from the republican delegations in congress, and I believe every one of them recommended a majority of democrats. But, after all many Republicans were appointed; and I mean no disparagement to them when I say I do not see that their superiority of success has been so marked as to throw great suspicion on the good faith of those who are not Republicans.”<sup>190</sup>

The egotistical Schurz replied impertinently. “I fear you entertain too favorable a view of the causes of our defeat in the elections,” he argued, denying Lincoln’s major points and insisting that unsuccessful generals were retained in command too long. “Was I really wrong in saying that the principal management of the war had been in the hands of your opponents?” Schurz asked. “Or will perhaps anybody assert, that such men as McClellan and Buell and Halleck have the least sympathy with you or your views and principles?” Republican generals were never given a fair chance to prove themselves, he charged. Like a schoolmaster chastising a recreant pupil, Schurz lectured the president: “let us indulge in no delusions as to the true causes of our defeat in the elections. The people, so enthusiastic at the beginning of the war, had made enormous sacrifices. Hundreds of millions were spent, thousands of lives were lost apparently for nothing. The people had sown confidence and reaped disaster and disappointment. They wanted a

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<sup>190</sup> Lincoln to Schurz, Washington, 10 November 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:493-95.

change, and as an unfortunate situation like ours is apt to confuse the minds of men, they sought it in the wrong direction. I entreat you, do not attribute to small incidents, as the enlisting of Republican voters in the army and the attack of the press, what is a great historical event. It is best that you, and you more than anybody else in this Republic, should see the fact in its true light and appreciate its significance: the result of the elections was a most serious and severe reproof administered to the Administration. Do not refuse to listen to the voice of the people. Let it not become too true what I have heard said; that of all places in this country it is Washington where public opinion is least heard, and of all places in Washington the White House. The result of the election has complicated the crisis. Energy and success, by which you would and ought to have commanded public opinion, form now the prestige of your enemies. They are a great and powerful weapon. Your enemies will not stop where they are, and, unless things take soon a favorable turn, our troubles may soon involve not only the moral power but the physical existence of the government. Only relentless determination on your part can turn the tide. You must reconquer the confidence of the people at any price, or your administration is lost.”

Schurz self-righteously claimed that he, as a general, had special moral authority to criticize the president: “the spectacle of war is apt to awaken solemn and serious feelings in the heart of one who has some sympathy with his fellow beings. I command a few thousands of brave and good fellows, entitled to life and happiness just as well as the rest of us; and when I see their familiar faces around the campfire and think of it, that tomorrow they may be called upon to die, – to die for a cause which for this or that reason is perhaps doomed to fail, and thus to die in vain; – and when I hear the wailings of so

many widows and orphans, and remember the scenes of heart-rending misery and desolation I have already witnessed – and then think of a possibility, that all this may be for nothing, – then, I must confess, my heart begins sometimes to sink within me and to quail under what little responsibility I have in this business. I do not know, whether you have ever seen a battlefield. I assure you, Mr. President, it is a terrible sight.”<sup>191</sup>

Taking understandable umbrage at Schurz’s lecture, the president sent a crushing rebuke: “I certainly know that if the war fails, the administration fails, and that I will be blamed for it, whether I deserve it or not. And I ought to be blamed, if I could do better. You think I could do better; therefore you blame me already. I think I could not do better; therefore I blame you for blaming me. I understand you now to be willing to accept the help of men, who are not republicans, provided they have ‘heart in it.’ Agreed. I want no others. But who is to be the judge of hearts, or of ‘heart in it’? If I must discard my own judgment, and take yours, I must also take that of others; and by the time I should reject all I should be advised to reject, I should have none left, republicans, or others—not even yourself. For, be assured, my dear sir, there are men who have ‘heart in it’ that think you are performing your part as poorly as you think I am performing mine. I certainly have been dissatisfied with the slowness of Buell and McClellan; but before I relieved them I had great fears I should not find successors to them, who would do better; and I am sorry to add, that I have seen little since to relieve those fears. I do not clearly see the prospect of any more rapid movements. I fear we shall at last find out that the difficulty is in our case, rather than in particular generals. I wish to disparage no one—certainly not those who sympathize with me; but I must say I need success more than I need sympathy, and

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<sup>191</sup> Schurz to Lincoln, Centerville, Virginia, 20 November 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

that I have not seen the so much greater evidence of getting success from my sympathizers, than from those who are denounced as the contrary. It does seem to me that in the field the two classes have been very much alike, in what they have done, and what they have failed to do. In sealing their faith with their blood, [Edward D.] Baker, an[d] [Nathaniel] Lyon, and [Henry] Bohlen, and [Israel B.] Richardson, republicans, did all that men could do; but did they any more than [Philip] Kearney, and [Isaac I.] Stevens, and [Jesse L.] Reno, and [Joseph K. F.] Mansfield, none of whom were republicans, and some, at least of whom, have been bitterly, and repeatedly, denounced to me as secession sympathizers? I will not perform the ungrateful task of comparing cases of failure.”<sup>192</sup>

Lincoln had chosen many Democrats as generals in order to win the support of their party, without which the war effort was doomed. Though several of them proved inept in the field (e.g., Benjamin F. Butler), they served a useful political function. Their appointments Lincoln regarded as an indispensable investment national unity.<sup>193</sup>

Naturally Democrats were more likely to support the administration if their leaders became high-ranking military officers. In the spring of 1861, Democrats in one Illinois town threw rocks at army recruits marching off to war and said they hoped all the “dam[ned] black Republicans would be killed.” But when Democratic Congressman William R. Morrison received a colonel’s commission and undertook to raise a regiment, “no more was said about this ‘horrible, unjust war.’”<sup>194</sup> Some Democratic generals, like John A. Logan, proved to be highly capable military leaders.

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<sup>192</sup> Lincoln to Schurz, Washington, 24 November 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:509-510.

<sup>193</sup> Thomas J. Goss, The War within the Union High Command: Politics and Generalship during the Civil War (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 204-11.

<sup>194</sup> C. H. Kettler to Lyman Trumbull, Waterloo, Illinois, 22 December 1861, Lyman Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.



At the president's invitation, Schurz called at the White House to discuss matters further. "Now tell me, young man, whether you really think that I am as poor a fellow as you have made me out in your letter!" Lincoln exclaimed. After a friendly explanation of his policies, the president slapped Schurz's knee, laughed, and asked: "Didn't I give it to you hard in my letter? Didn't I? But it didn't hurt, did it? I did not mean to, and therefore I wanted you to come so quickly." He suggested that the general, whom Lincoln regarded as a kind of surrogate son, continue writing him. The brash Teuton often did so.<sup>195</sup>

But Lincoln's explanation of his party's setback was inadequate. In truth, the voters, as the Cincinnati Gazette put it, "are depressed by the interminable nature of this war, as so far conducted, and by the rapid exhaustion of the national resources without progress."<sup>196</sup> Yet the president was clearly right in stating that the absence of many supporters serving in the military hurt the Republicans. A defeated Ohio state legislator told Lincoln that in his district eighty percent "of the forces sent into the field are from the Union ranks. . . . We could not induce the opposition to enlist, except an occasional one to keep up an appearance of Loyalty."<sup>197</sup> Ohio and other states which did not provide absentee ballots for the troops went Democratic; states like Iowa, which allowed soldiers to vote, went Republican. If all soldiers had voted, and they had cast their ballots in the same fashion that eligible soldiers did, Republicans would have won majorities in every Northern state save New Jersey.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Carl Schurz, The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz (3 vols.; New York: McClure, 1907-1908), 2:396

<sup>196</sup> Cincinnati Gazette 17 October 1862, in Nevins, War for the Union, 2:322.

<sup>197</sup> William H. West to Lincoln, Bellefontaine, Ohio, 20 October 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>198</sup> New York Tribune, 16, 22, 27 October 1862.

In response to the defeat, Nicolay wrote an editorial for the Washington Daily Morning Chronicle, probably at the behest of Lincoln, arguing that because the Democrats had for the most part insisted during the campaign that they favored a vigorous prosecution of the war, their representatives in Congress therefore “must sustain the President in his war measures and war policy,” including emancipation. “Either they must do this or be false to their pledges to the people.”<sup>199</sup> (The Chronicle, edited by John W. Forney, began publication in November 1862 and was widely regarded as an administration organ. John Hay as well as Nicolay wrote for it.)

#### SOARING RHETORIC: THE SECOND ANNUAL MESSAGE TO CONGRESS

When the Thirty-seventh Congress reconvened for its lame-duck session in December, the mood was sour. “It seems to me that this is the darkest day yet, and no ray of light as yet penetrates the thick clouds which hang over us,” Henry L. Dawes of Massachusetts wrote from Washington on December 10. “There is no change for the better here. We have reached this state of things for want of capacity and that can’t be supplied.”<sup>200</sup>

In his annual message, Lincoln once more urged Congress to adopt gradual, compensated emancipation. The members listened “with almost breathless attention” as his annual message was read to them.<sup>201</sup> “Without slavery the rebellion could never have existed,” he asserted; “without slavery it could not continue.” Instead of passing statutes like the Confiscations Acts, which courts could overrule, he suggested in that constitutional amendments be enacted providing federal aid to states which abolished

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<sup>199</sup> Washington Daily Morning Chronicle, 12 November 1862, in Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 91-92.

<sup>200</sup> Dawes to his wife, Washington, 10 December 1862, Dawes Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>201</sup> Washington correspondence, 1 December, New York Evening Post, 2 December 1862.

slavery by 1900; guaranteeing freedom to slaves already liberated by the war, with compensation paid to loyal slave owners; and funding colonization efforts. In justifying compensation, he remarked that Northerners as well as Southerners were responsible for the introduction and continuance of slavery. In something of a non-sequitur, he rebutted the Democratic contention that freed slaves would take the jobs of whites. “If there ever could be a proper time for mere catch arguments, that time surely is not now. In times like the present, men should utter nothing for which they would not willingly be responsible through time and in eternity.” Liberated slaves would not move to the North, he predicted; even if they did, whites would outnumber them seven-to-one.

Rhetorically he asked: “is it doubted, then, that the plan I propose, if adopted, would shorten the war, and thus lessen its expenditure of money and of blood? Is it doubted that it would restore the national authority and national prosperity? Is it doubted that we here – Congress and the Executive – can secure its adoption? Will not the good people respond to a united, and earnest appeal from us? Can we, can they, by any other means, so certainly, or so speedily assure these vital objects? We can succeed only by concert. It is not ‘can any of us imagine better?’ but ‘can we all do better?’”

In an inspired conclusion, Lincoln supplied the soaring rhetoric so conspicuously absent from the legalistic Emancipation Proclamation: “The dogmas of the quiet past, are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise to the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think and act anew. We must disenthral ourselves, and then we shall save our country. Fellow citizens, we cannot escape history. We of this Congress and this administration, will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance, or insignificance, can spare one or another of us.

The fiery trial through which we pass, will light us down, in honor or dishonor, to the latest generation. We say we are for the Union. The world will not forget that we say this. We know how to save the Union. The world knows we do know how to save it. We – even we here – hold the power, and bear the responsibility. In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free – honorable alike in what we give, and what we preserve. We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope of earth.”<sup>202</sup>

Few of his state papers were more eloquent. The New York Tribune lauded its concluding passage extravagantly: “Sentiments so noble, so forcible, so profoundly true, have very rarely found their way into the manifestoes of rulers and Governments. . . . Their appearance in a President’s Message is an immense fact, significant, fruitful, enduring. The howls and jeers of a million ‘lewd fellows of the baser sort’ are soon stilled and forgotten; while the reverberations of one such voice are prolonged and diffused through centuries.” The editors also praised the compensated emancipation plan as “eminently a measure of conciliation and peace.”<sup>203</sup> Lincoln’s “homely terseness and honest frankness of expression” pleased the Providence Journal.<sup>204</sup> The moderate New York Times called the message “concise, clear and perspicuous” but expressed doubt that Congress would enact the emancipation plan.<sup>205</sup>

Most observers shared the Times’ pessimism.<sup>206</sup> Upon hearing the message, Orville H. Browning was surprised “by the hallucination the President seems to be

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<sup>202</sup> Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:518-37.

<sup>203</sup> New York Tribune 4, 3 December 1862.

<sup>204</sup> Providence Journal, 3 December 1862.

<sup>205</sup> New York Times, 2 December 1862.

<sup>206</sup> Providence Journal, 3 December 1862; Washington correspondence by Murat Halstead, 1 December, Cincinnati Commercial, 4 December 1862.

laboring under that Congress can suppress the rebellion by adopting his plan of compensated emancipation, when if there was no opposition to it, it would require at least four years to have it adopted.”<sup>207</sup> An Ohio congressman called the compensation proposal “a most impracticable scheme” which “nobody likes. Nobody will give it a cordial support & yet he has loaded his friends down with its odium while probably nothing will be done with it.”<sup>208</sup> Henry L. Dawes was equally dismissive: “How it makes one’s heart bleed for his country to have its chief magistrate proposing measures to be accomplished in 1900 as a remedy for evils and perils which have thrust us . . . into the very jaws of death. Whether the Republic shall live six months or not is the question thundering in our ears and the chief magistrate answers I’ve got a plan which is going to work well in the next century.”<sup>209</sup> General James A. Garfield, who was present when the message was read aloud, found the president’s scheme “most weak and absurd.” Garfield could hardly believe his ears when he “heard no word or sentence that indicated that the administration intended to push the war to a triumphant conclusion. Indeed, it hardly contained a sentence which implied that we are in the midst of war at all.”<sup>210</sup> A Boston abolitionist concluded that Lincoln “seems to be a man of inadequate calibre; he does not comprehend his position.”<sup>211</sup> Henry Ward Beecher patronizingly remarked that while it was “pleasing to know the opinions of any intelligent man on public topics,” Lincoln “was not placed in the Presidential chair to read lectures to Congress on political

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<sup>207</sup> Pease and Randall, eds., Browning Diary, 1:591 (entry for 1 December 1862).

<sup>208</sup> Allan G. Bogue, ed., “William Parker Cutler’s Congressional Diary of 1862-63,” Civil War History 33 (1987): 320.

<sup>209</sup> Dawes to his wife, Washington, 2 December 1862, Dawes Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>210</sup> James A. Garfield to Burke Hinsdale, Washington, 1 December 1862, Frederick D. Williams, ed., The Wild Life of the Army: Civil War Letters of James A. Garfield (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1964), 185.

<sup>211</sup> Boston Commonwealth, 6 December 1862.

economy, nor to manage a war with reference to New York politics, nor to undertake to draw out on paper how anyone may settle the questions of the next century. . . . There is the enemy. Defeat him.”<sup>212</sup> Similar criticism appeared in many newspapers.<sup>213</sup>

Though Congress received the document “without enthusiastic applause,” Charles Sumner approved of it, saying “Massachusetts was satisfied – & all reasonable men ought to be so if we could get rid of slavery at the end of this century & that without any more fighting.” Sumner doubted that Lincoln’s “olive branch would be accepted.” But if it were, he asked “who would be fool enough to refuse it on our side [–] no real abolitionist certainly.”<sup>214</sup> He thought “we had got our prow in the right direction.”<sup>215</sup> Most of his fellow Radicals, however, found the message unsatisfactory.<sup>216</sup> The New York Evening Post asserted that “to free men gradually, or by installments, is like cutting off a dog’s tail by inches, to get him used to the pain.”<sup>217</sup> The message “greatly disappointed” Radical Congressman James Ashley, but after speaking with the president, the Ohioan said he “felt confident that in heart he was far in advance of the message.”<sup>218</sup> Henry Winter Davis called Lincoln’s proposed constitutional amendments “impossible in his way of viewing them, illusory to the loyal states & ridiculous in relation to the disloyal states.” The

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<sup>212</sup> Paxton Hibben, Henry Ward Beecher: An American Portrait (New York: G. H. Doran, 1927), 160.

<sup>213</sup> New York Tribune, 2 December 1862; Washington correspondence, 2 December, New York Herald, 3 December 1862; New York Commercial Advertiser, n.d., quoted in the New York Herald, 3 December 1862; Mount Vernon, Ohio, Republican, n.d., copied in the Boston Commonwealth, 10 January 1863.

<sup>214</sup> Washington correspondence, 1 December, New York Tribune, 2 December 1862; Sumner told this to Elizabeth Blair Lee. Elizabeth Blair Lee to her husband, Silver Spring, 2 December 1862, Laas, ed., Wartime Washington, 211.

<sup>215</sup> Washington correspondence, 1 December, New York Tribune, 2 December 1862;

<sup>216</sup> Washington correspondence, 1 December, New York Herald, 2 December 1862.

<sup>217</sup> Quoted in the New York Herald, 3 December 1862.

<sup>218</sup> Ashley to George B. Cheever, Washington, 23 December 1862, Cheever Family Papers, American Antiquarian Society.

message in general seemed to Davis “wise, liberal, eloquent & impressive – everything but practical & practicable,” with “every quality but the highest & the rarest – a knowledge that temporizing is fatal in great emergencies.”<sup>219</sup>

Some wondered why Lincoln revived his compensated emancipation proposal one month before the Emancipation Proclamation was to take effect. The abolitionist Moncure Conway asked: “if the President means to carry out his Edict of Freedom on the New Year, what is all this stuff about gradual emancipation?”<sup>220</sup> Conway and others feared that the compensated emancipation plan would replace the Emancipation Proclamation.<sup>221</sup> William Lloyd Garrison said “we shall not be surprised if he substituted some other project for it. A man so manifestly without moral vision . . . cannot be safely relied upon in any emergency.”<sup>222</sup> Conservative papers like the New York Herald and World speculated that the president would not issue the proclamation.

Lincoln reportedly told a Border State delegation “that, as to his Emancipation proclamation, he had acted from the belief that it would effect good results; but, if he could be convinced to the contrary, he would modify his position on that subject.”<sup>223</sup> But he immediately amended his statement, telling a Kentucky member: “You know me, and when I tell you that I have made up my mind that slavery is the right arm of the rebellion, you will be convinced that it is my purpose to lop it off!”<sup>224</sup> And Lincoln assured

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<sup>219</sup> Henry Winter Davis to Mrs. S. F. Du Pont, n.p., 2 January 1863, transcript, S. F. Du Pont Papers, Hagley Museum, Wilmington, Delaware.

<sup>220</sup> Boston Commonwealth, 6 December 1862.

<sup>221</sup> Washington correspondence, 8 December, National Anti-Slavery Standard (New York), 13 December 1862.

<sup>222</sup> The Liberator (Boston), 26 December 1862.

<sup>223</sup> “The President and the Crisis,” National Anti-Slavery Standard (New York), 27 December 1862.

<sup>224</sup> Washington correspondence, 21 December, National Anti-Slavery Standard (New York), 27 December 1862.

Congress that his plan was “recommended as a means, not in exclusion of, but additional to, all others.” Moreover, one of the proposed amendments stipulated that every slave “who shall have enjoyed actual freedom by the chances of war, at any time before the end of the rebellion, shall be forever free.”<sup>225</sup> On December 22, Lincoln told Congressman Ashley that he would definitely issue the Proclamation.<sup>226</sup>

Democrats dismissed the message because it rested on the assumption that “this Federal Government was created to do about every thing, instead of little or nothing, and that the chiefest object of its creation was to free negroes.”<sup>227</sup> The Cincinnati Enquirer called it “[p]oor in manner, poorer still in argument, avoiding the topics for the discussion of which the people looked with the utmost anxiety, and giving prominence to ideas of which they are tired and disgusted.”<sup>228</sup> The Border State delegations, to Lincoln’s chagrin (if not surprise), were unenthusiastic.<sup>229</sup>

It is not entirely clear why Lincoln once again trotted out his compensated emancipation scheme. David Davis reported that the president’s “whole soul is absorbed in his plan of remunerative emancipation. . . . He believes that if Congress will pass a Law authorizing the issuance of bonds for the payment of the emancipated negroes in the border states that Delaware, Maryland Kentucky & Mo. will accept the terms. He takes great encouragement from the vote in Mo.”<sup>230</sup> The electoral triumph by Missouri

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<sup>225</sup> Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 536, 530.

<sup>226</sup> Ashley to George B. Cheever, Washington, 23 December 1862, Cheever Family Papers, American Antiquarian Society.

<sup>227</sup> New York Evening Express, 2 December 1862.

<sup>228</sup> Charles Ray Wilson, “The Cincinnati Daily Enquirer and Civil War Politics: A Study of Copperhead Opinion” (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1934), 186.

<sup>229</sup> Washington correspondence, 2 December, New York Evening Post, 3 December 1862.

<sup>230</sup> David Davis to Leonard Swett, Lenox, Massachusetts, 26 November 1862, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.



Republicans who supported gradual, compensated emancipation led the president to hope that the scheme might be practicable there. Reports from Missouri indicated that his hopes were not unreasonable.<sup>231</sup> The St. Louis Missouri Democrat appealed to Congress and the Northern people to fund Lincoln's program.<sup>232</sup> The president was also heartened by a group of Kentuckians, led by Congressman Samuel L. Casey, who met with him repeatedly in November and offered assurances that they could effectively promote gradual emancipation by establishing two newspapers and dispatching speakers throughout the state. Joseph Holt believed that if new leadership emerged in the Bluegrass State, it would accept the presidential plan. In Maryland, several knowledgeable leaders maintained that if Congress appropriated funds for compensating slaveholders, state legislators would abolish the peculiar institution. But in the absence of such federal help, they would not.<sup>233</sup>

If Missouri, Maryland, and Kentucky did free their slaves with financial help from Congress, backlash against emancipation would be minimized. If they failed to do so, Lincoln at least wanted to appear magnanimous by demonstrating his willingness to go to great lengths in helping them avoid the shock of sudden, uncompensated emancipation. He had adopted a similar strategy during the secession crisis; he would later do so in dealing with Confederate peace feelers.<sup>234</sup> Lincoln's decision to stick with the compensation plan also resembles his willingness to retain McClellan for such a long

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<sup>231</sup> Hawkins Taylor to Lyman Trumbull, Washington, 26 January 1863, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>232</sup> Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican, 26 November 1862.

<sup>233</sup> David Davis to Leonard Swett, Lenox, Massachusetts, 26 November 1862, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>234</sup> For a different view of Lincoln's motives, see William W. Freehling, The South vs. the South: How Anti-Confederate Southerners Shaped the Course of the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 108-14.

time. He knew that Little Mac enjoyed the support of the army, and therefore he wished to give the general every chance to prove himself.<sup>235</sup> So too he wished to give slaveholders every chance to avoid abrupt, uncompensated emancipation. Probably he shared Chase's doubt that two-thirds of Congress would pass such amendments.<sup>236</sup> Still more improbable was the likelihood that three-quarters of the states would ratify them if perchance they won congressional approval.

It was possible that Congress might appropriate money to compensate slaveholders. On December 10, Senator John B. Henderson introduced a bill (which Lincoln may have drafted) earmarking funds to compensate Missouri slave owners. In the House, Congressman John W. Noell of Missouri offered a slightly different proposal. Lincoln, who said "that if no appropriation was made, then the bottom would be out of the tub," took a keen interest in Congress's action on these measures. On January 9, he told Senators Orville H. Browning and John P. Hale that in the past week blacks "were stampeding in Missouri, which was producing great dissatisfaction among our friends there, and that the democratic legislatures of Illinois & Indiana seemed bent upon mischief, and the party in those states was talking of a union with the lower Mississippi states." He added that "we could at once stop that trouble by passing a law immediately appropriating \$25,000,000 to pay for the slaves in Missouri – that Missouri being a free state the others would give up their scheme – that Missouri was an empire of herself – could sustain a population equal to half the population of the United States, and pay the interest on all of our debt, and we ought to drive a stake there immediately."

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<sup>235</sup> David Davis to Leonard Swett, Lenox, Massachusetts, 26 November 1862, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>236</sup> Salmon P. Chase to Lincoln, Washington, 28 November 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

Fervently he appealed the two senators: “you and I must die but it will be enough for us to have done in our lives if we make Missouri free.”<sup>237</sup>

The following day Lincoln wrote General Samuel R. Curtis in St. Louis: “I understand there is considerable trouble with the slaves in Missouri. Please do your best to keep peace on the question for two or three weeks, by which time we hope to do something here towards settling the question in Missouri.”<sup>238</sup> Each house of Congress passed a bill, but fierce resistance by Border State delegations blocked reconciliation of the two statutes, and the plan died with the expiration of the Thirty-seventh Congress. “If the Missouri bill had gone through,” Henderson thought, “the others would have followed undoubtedly and the loyal slaveholders in all of the border States would have received pay for their slaves.”<sup>239</sup>

Lincoln was bitterly disappointed. In exasperation, he declared that the “dissensions between Union men in Missouri are due solely to a factious spirit which is exceedingly reprehensible. The two parties ought to have their heads knocked together. Either would rather see the defeat of their adversary than that of Jefferson Davis. To this spirit of faction is to be ascribed . . . the defeat of the Missouri Aid bill in Congress, the passage of which [I] strongly desired.”<sup>240</sup>

#### CALAMITY: REPLACING McCLELLAN WITH BURNSIDE

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<sup>237</sup> Pease and Randall, eds., Browning Diary, 1:611-12 (entry for 9 January 1863).

<sup>238</sup> Lincoln to Curtis, Washington, 10 January 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:52

<sup>239</sup> Parrish, Turbulent Partnership, 138-139; Washington correspondence, 29 October, New York Herald, 30 October 1862; Henderson's reminiscences in Walter B. Stevens, “Lincoln and Missouri,” Missouri Historical Review 10 (1915-1916):84.

<sup>240</sup> James Taussig to members of a committee of Missouri Radicals, Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 9 June 1863.

Finding a replacement for McClellan proved difficult. Lincoln did not consider appointing Halleck to replace McClellan, for, as he told the cabinet, he thought Old Brains “would be an indifferent general in the field; that he shrank from responsibility in his present position; that he is a moral coward, worth but little except as a critic, though intelligent and educated.”<sup>241</sup> So he turned once again to Ambrose E. Burnside, who had twice declined the job. This time the president insisted, and the personable, modest, thirty-eighty-year-old corps commander from Rhode Island accepted after protesting that he “was not competent to command such a large army.”<sup>242</sup> He rightly feared that if he turned it down yet again, Joseph Hooker, whom he despised, would be given the job.<sup>243</sup> Burnside was chosen because he was next in rank behind McClellan and because none of the other corps commanders (with the possible exception of Hooker) seemed more capable than the man who had won battles at Roanoke Island, Fort Macon, and New Bern, North Carolina. He had acquired the reputation of a fighter and had invented a breech-loading carbine used by some cavalry. Moreover, he was a friend of Little Mac and thus acceptable to that general’s many army admirers.<sup>244</sup>

Some in Congress favored the appointment of Hooker. Senator William P. Fessenden said Fighting Joe “has shown more brains than any of them, and it is in his favor that he despises McLellan, and does not hesitate to say so, openly.”<sup>245</sup> When

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<sup>241</sup> Howard K. Beale and Alan W. Brownsword, eds., Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy under Lincoln and Johnson (3 vols.; New York: W.W. Norton, 1960), 1:180 (entry for 4 November 1862)

<sup>242</sup> United States Congress, Report of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, at the Second Session, Thirty-eighth Congress (3 vols.; Washington: Government Printing Office, 1865), 1:650.

<sup>243</sup> William Marvel, Burnside (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 159-60.

<sup>244</sup> Williams, Lincoln and His Generals, 180-82; Kenneth P. Williams, Lincoln Finds a General: A Military Study of the Civil War (5 vols.; New York: Macmillan, 1949-59), 2:480-81.

<sup>245</sup> William P. Fessenden to James W. Grimes, Portland, 19 October 1862, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College.

Congressman William D. Kelley recommended that Hooker be given command, Lincoln replied that “Burnside would be better, for he is the better housekeeper.”

“You are not in search of a housekeeper or a hospital steward, but of a soldier who will fight, and fight to win,” Kelley protested.

“I am not so sure,” the president said softly, “that we are not in search of a housekeeper. I tell you, Kelley, the successful management of an army requires a good deal of faithful housekeeping. More fight will be got out of well-fed and well-cared-for soldiers and animals that can be got out of those that are required to make long marches with empty stomachs, and whose strength and cheerfulness are impaired by the failure to distribute proper rations at proper seasons.”<sup>246</sup>

In fact, the president wanted to place Hooker in command of the Army of the Potomac, for, as he told a friend, “Fremont, and some others . . . are uneasy and impatient, and make me trouble, but I like Joe, for when he has nothing to do, he does nothing!” Halleck and others, however, dissuaded Lincoln.<sup>247</sup> The main obstacle to Hooker’s appointment was his reputation as a toper, based in part in his excessive drinking during his California years.<sup>248</sup>

Instead of having the army go into winter quarters, Lincoln hoped it would fight once again before cold weather made an attack impossible. He shared the opinion of

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<sup>246</sup> Kelley in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 278.

<sup>247</sup> “A Word about Hooker,” Chicago Tribune, 5 February 1863; Mason Brayman to “My Darling Ditty,” Boise City, Idaho, 22 April 1877, Lincoln Associates Collection, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne. Chase and Mary Lincoln both assured Hooker that either he or Hunter would soon replace McClellan. Adams S. Hill to Sydney Howard Gay, [Washington, late September or early October 1862], Gay Papers, Columbia University.

<sup>248</sup> This was reported by Henry B. Stanton. George W. Smalley to Wendell Phillips, New York, 17 November 1862, Phillips Papers, Harvard University.

George William Curtis, who predicted that if “we only strike earnestly, we shall destroy the enemy.” Curtis thought the “time has come to say, ‘Up Abe, and at ’em.’”<sup>249</sup>

Burnside promptly submitted a plan calling for an assault on Richmond via Fredericksburg. He would march the army southeast to Falmouth, opposite Fredericksburg, and cross the Rappahannock River over pontoon bridges, which were to be in place before the Confederates realized that the army had left Warrenton. On November 14, the president approved this scheme, though he would have preferred that Burnside attack Richmond along the route he had ordered McClellan to follow, directly toward Richmond via the Orange and Alexandria railroad.

Burnside moved quickly, but when his army began arriving at Falmouth on November 17, it found no pontoons. Halleck and his subordinates had fumbled the assignment to deliver those essential items; during the fateful week that passed before they arrived, Lee occupied Fredericksburg.<sup>250</sup>

Alarmed by the delay, Lincoln sailed to Falmouth and on November 26-27 conferred at length with Burnside, who said that “he could take into battle now any day, about, one hundred and ten thousand men, that his army is in good spirit, good condition, good moral[e], and that in all respects he is satisfied with officers and men; that he does not want more men with him, because he could not handle them to advantage; that he thinks he can cross the river in face of the enemy and drive him away, but that, to use his own expression, it is somewhat risky.” The president, who wanted the army’s “crossing of the river to be nearly free from risk,” assured Burnside that the nation would patiently

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<sup>249</sup> Curtis to Charles Eliot Norton, North Shore, New York, 11 November 1862, Curtis Papers, Harvard University.

<sup>250</sup> Halleck was chiefly to blame. Marszalek, Halleck, 157.

bear with him and he should not feel pressured to attack before he felt ready. Lincoln also suggested that instead of a frontal assault against Fredericksburg, the army wait till a 25,000-man column could be assembled on the south bank of the Rappahannock far downstream from Fredericksburg; at the same time, a force of similar size would gather on the Pamunkey. When those columns were in place, they could launch a simultaneous assault in coordination with Burnside and thus drive Lee from Fredericksburg and prevent him from falling back to the Richmond entrenchments. “I think the plan promises the best results, with the least hazzard, of any now conceivable,” Lincoln told Halleck.<sup>251</sup>

Burnside argued that Lincoln’s plan, though sound in principle, would postpone the operation too much. When Halleck concurred, the president shelved his scheme. Upon returning to Washington he was reportedly “a good deal depressed” and “greatly discouraged.”<sup>252</sup>

Meanwhile, the Confederates dug into exceptionally strong positions behind Fredericksburg. Burnside therefore considered crossing the Rappahannock at a location several miles below the town, but Lee moved quickly to defend that site. Foul weather hindered Burnside’s preparations for assault, but finally, on December 11, some of his men managed to lay down pontoons, cross the river, and drive the enemy from the town.

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<sup>251</sup> Lincoln to Halleck, Steamer Baltimore off Aquia Creek, 26 November 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:514-515; David S. Sparks, ed., Inside Lincoln’s Army: The Diary of Marsena Rudolph Patrick, Provost Marshall General, Army of the Potomac (New York: T. Yoseloff, 1964), 182-183 (entry for 28 November 1862).

<sup>252</sup> E. B. Washburne to his wife, Washington, 30 November 1862, Washburn Family Papers, Washburn Memorial Library, Norlands, Maine; Adams S. Hill to Sydney Howard Gay, Washington, 29 November 1862, Gay Papers, Columbia University.

Upon learning of this accomplishment, Lincoln rejoiced. “The rebellion is now virtually at an end,” he exulted, predicting that Richmond would fall by New Years.<sup>253</sup>

Two days later the president’s elation turned to despair as the army stormed the heights above the town and sustained a crushing defeat, taking over 12,000 casualties, while the Confederates lost less than half that number.

While the battle raged, Lincoln visited the War Department and anxiously conned telegrams from the front, but they were quite vague.<sup>254</sup> When General Herman Haupt arrived from Falmouth, the president eagerly quizzed him about the progress of the fighting. Once he understood the peril confronting Burnside, Lincoln went to Halleck’s residence and instructed him to command the general to withdraw across the Rappahannock. “I will do no such thing,” the general-in-chief replied. “If such orders are issued, you must take the responsibility of issuing them yourself. I hold that an officer in command of an army in the field ought to be more familiar with the details of the situation than parties at a distance and should be allowed to exercise his own discretion.” When Haupt predicted that Burnside would soon be able to retreat unmolested, the president sighed deeply and told him: “What you say gives me a great many grains of comfort.”<sup>255</sup> Turning to Halleck, Lincoln “remarked that as far as his observation extended, our friend Haupt had always come up to time in his department better than almost any one else.” The general-in-chief agreed. After this interview, Haupt wrote his

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<sup>253</sup> Washington correspondence, 11 December, New York Times, 12 December 1862.

<sup>254</sup> E. B. Washburne to his wife, Washington, 19 December 1862, Washburn Family Papers, Washburn Memorial Library, Norlands, Maine; Washington correspondence, 13 December, New York Evening Post, 14 December 1862.

<sup>255</sup> Haupt, “The Railroad Brigade,” Philadelphia Weekly Times, 22 September 1884.



wife: “I pity the President very much. He is an honest and good man but never was poor mortal more harassed.”<sup>256</sup>

Upon his return to the White House, Lincoln received another eyewitness account of the slaughter from journalist Henry Villard, who described the grim battlefield and suggested that Burnside retreat. “I hope it is not so bad as all that,” Lincoln sighed.<sup>257</sup>

But it was, and so the president despaired. “I wonder if the damned in hell suffer less than I do,” he said plaintively.<sup>258</sup> Similarly he declared that “[i]f there is a worse place than hell I am in it.”<sup>259</sup> (A variation on this statement had Lincoln say: “if there was any worse Hell than he had been in for two days, he would like to know it.”)<sup>260</sup> When Pennsylvania Governor Andrew G. Curtin depicted to him the carnage at Fredericksburg, Lincoln “moaned and groaned in anguish,” “wrung his hands and showed great agony of spirit,” his face “darkened with pain,” he “walked the floor, wringing his hands and uttering exclamations of grief,” repeatedly asking: “What has God put me in this place for?”<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Haupt to his wife, Washington, 15, 18 December 1862, typescripts, Lewis Haupt Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>257</sup> Henry Villard, Memoirs of Henry Villard, Journalist and Financier: 1838-1900 (2 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1904), 1:391.

<sup>258</sup> Baltimore American, 26 March 1864, in J. T. Dorris, “President Lincoln’s Clemency,” Lincoln Herald 55 (1953): 6.

<sup>259</sup> William Henry Wadsworth to S. L. M. Barlow, Washington, 16 December 1862, Barlow Papers.

<sup>260</sup> Samuel Wilkeson to Sidney Howard Gay, [Washington, 19 December 1862], Gay Papers, Columbia University.

<sup>261</sup> William O. Stoddard, “White House Sketches, No. VII,” New York Citizen, 29 September 1866, in 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), 171; reminiscences of Curtin in William A. Mowry, “Some Incidents in the Life of Abraham Lincoln,” Uxbridge and Whitinsville [Massachusetts] Transcript, 1913 [no day or month indicated], clipping, Harry E. Pratt Papers, University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana.

Lincoln would told a congressman that he would rather be a soldier in the ranks than president: “There is not a man in the army with whom I would not willingly change places.”<sup>262</sup> He interrupted another congressman, freshly returned from Fredericksburg, who was recounting the battle: “Covode, I beg you not to tell me anything more of that kind. I have as much on me now as I can bear.”<sup>263</sup> A War Department telegrapher reported that when “it was learned that over 13,000 men were killed, the calamity seemed to crush Lincoln. He did not get over it for a long time and, all that winter of 1863, he was downcast and depressed. He felt that the loss was his fault.”<sup>264</sup>

Lincoln’s despair was so palpable that Noah Brooks expressed shock at his appearance. Comparing him with the vigorous campaigner he had known back in Illinois, Brooks wrote that the president’s “hair is grizzled, his gait more stooping, his countenance sallow, and there is a sunken, deathly look about the large cavernous eyes.” Philosophically Brooks remarked that it “is a lesson for human ambition to look upon that anxious and careworn face, prematurely aged by public labors and private griefs, and to remember that with the fleeting glory of his term of office have come responsibilities which make his life one long series of harassing cares.”<sup>265</sup> Murat Halstead told readers of the Cincinnati Commercial that no one could observe the president’s face “and believe that he is insensible to the responsibilities pressing upon him. I know he always had a

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<sup>262</sup> Peoria Transcript, 27 December 1862.

<sup>263</sup> Herman Haupt to his wife, Washington, 18 December 1862, typescript, Lewis Haupt Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>264</sup> Reminiscences of Edward Rosewater in Victor Rosewater, “Lincoln in Emancipation Days,” St. Nicholas 65 (February 1937): 13. See also interviews with Rosewater, 21 March 1898, Ida M. Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College, and in Frank G. Carpenter, “President Lincoln’s Telegraph Operator,” unidentified clipping dated Omaha, 27 June (probably 1896), Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne.

<sup>265</sup> Washington correspondence, 4 December, Sacramento Daily Union, 30 December 1862, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 13.

doleful sort of physiognomy, but his features had not, two years ago, the pale and pinched appearance that they now wear.”<sup>266</sup> To Joshua Speed, Lincoln appeared “haggard and care-worn beyond what he expected to see in him.”<sup>267</sup>

David Davis, who also reported that Lincoln “looks weary & care worn” and that the “cares of this Government are very heavy on him,” thought it was “a good thing that that he is fond of anecdotes & telling them, for it relieves his spirits very much.”<sup>268</sup> The day after Fredericksburg, Davis and two other Illinoisans called at the White House, where Lincoln expressed his determination to press ahead no matter what reverses the Union suffered. He compared himself to a character made famous by the Rev. Mr. Sydney Smith in an 1831 speech: “I am sometimes reminded of old Mother Partington. You know the old lady lived on the sea beach, and one time a big storm came up and the waves began to rise till the water began to come in under her cabin door. She got a broom and went to sweeping it out. But the water rose higher and higher; to her knees; to her waist; at last to her chin. But she kept on sweeping and exclaiming, ‘I’ll keep on sweeping as long as the broom lasts and we will see whether the storm or the broom will last the longest!’ And that is the way with me.”<sup>269</sup>

Not everyone shared Davis’s positive view of the president’s humor. A soldier complained that “while Old Abe tells outsiders that something reminds him of an anecdote . . . thousands of lives are sacrificed & our beloved country [is] still sinking to

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<sup>266</sup> Washington correspondence by Murat Halstead, 1 December, Cincinnati Commercial, 4 December 1862.

<sup>267</sup> T. S. Bell to Joseph Holt, Louisville, 22 December 1862, Holt Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>268</sup> David Davis to Leonard Swett, Lenox, Massachusetts, 26 November 1862; Davis to Laura Swett, Washington, 21 December 1862; Davis to W. W. Orme, Washington, 9 December 1862, Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>269</sup> Willard L. King, Lincoln’s Manager: David Davis (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 207.

disgrace & ruin.”<sup>270</sup> Others contemptuously deemed Lincoln “the Border State Joking Machine” and called his administration “a huge untimely joke.”<sup>271</sup> To such critics, Lincoln explained: “if I could not tell these stories I would die.”<sup>272</sup> When Illinois Congressman Isaac N. Arnold chided him for reading the comic writer Artemas Ward, the president replied: “if I could not get momentary respite from the crushing burden I am constantly carrying I should die.”<sup>273</sup>

Lincoln’s humor inspired good-natured jests in others. A Southern clergyman reportedly speculated that God would favor the Confederacy because Jefferson Davis prayed so fervently for His blessing. When it was pointed out that Lincoln was a religious man and had probably prayed for the same thing, the minister replied: “If he has, the Lord undoubtedly thought he was joking!”<sup>274</sup>

Downcast as he was, the president extended the nation’s gratitude to the army: “Although you were not successful, the attempt was not an error, nor the failure other than an accident.” (The “accident” was the delay in delivering pontoons.) “The courage with which you, in an open field, maintained the contest against an entrenched foe, and the consummate skill and success with which you crossed and re-crossed the river, in face of the enemy, show that you possess all the qualities of a great army, which will yet give victory to the cause of the country and of popular government. Condoling with the

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<sup>270</sup> Hilon Parker to his brother, Cairo, Illinois, 29 December 1862, Parker Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>271</sup> Sam [Wilkeson] to Sydney Howard Gay, Washington, 15 August 1862 and [ca. late December 1862], Gay Papers, Columbia University.

<sup>272</sup> James M. Ashley, Reminiscences of the Great Rebellion: Calhoun, Seward and Lincoln (n.p., 1890), 31.

<sup>273</sup> Arnold told this to Congressman William A. Wheeler. New York Times, 10 May 1885.

<sup>274</sup> Washington correspondence by Van [D. W. Bartlett], 28 April, Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 2 May 1863.

mourners for the dead, and sympathizing with the severely wounded, I congratulate you that the number of both is comparatively so small.”<sup>275</sup>

To some these words seemed ironic. Colonel Charles S. Wainwright of the Army of the Potomac remarked: “Mr. Lincoln is more flattering to this army when defeated than when victorious. He had not a word to say to it after South Mountain and Antietam.” Puzzled by the president’s reference to “comparatively small” casualties, Wainwright asked: “Compared with what, I wonder; with the loss of the enemy? Or with the advantages gained? Or with our losses in previous battles?”<sup>276</sup>

The president was doubtless referring to the Confederate losses, which though much smaller than the Union’s, could not be replaced so easily. White House secretary William O. Stoddard recalled that soon after the battle, Lincoln analyzed the North’s comparative advantage: “if the same battle were to be fought over again, every day, through a week of days, with the same relative results, the army under Lee would be wiped out to its last man, the Army of the Potomac would still be a mighty host, the war would be over, the Confederacy gone, and peace would be won at a smaller cost of life than it will be if the week of lost battles must be dragged out through yet another year of camps and marches, and of deaths in hospitals, rather than upon the field. No general yet found can face the arithmetic; but the end of the war will be at hand when he shall be discovered.”<sup>277</sup> On December 21, he told General William K. Strong that the army was

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<sup>275</sup> Message to the Army of the Potomac, 22 December 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:13.

<sup>276</sup> Wainwright, Diary of a Battle, ed. Nevins, 149-150 (entry for 25 December 1862).

<sup>277</sup> Stoddard, Inside the White House, ed. Burlingame, 101.

“not as bad off as he apprehended,” that it “is not demoralized, but no onward movement can take place very soon where they are.”<sup>278</sup>

Lincoln did not blame Burnside for the defeat. “In my opinion Mr. Lee caused this trouble,” he said.<sup>279</sup> He also compared Burnside favorably to his predecessor: “Had Burnside had the same chances of success that McClellan wantonly cast away, to-day he would have been hailed as the saviour of his country. A golden opportunity was lost by the latter General at Antietam.”<sup>280</sup> Returning the favor, Burnside promised Lincoln that he would publish a letter accepting sole responsibility for the debacle. The grateful president told the general that he “was the first man he had found who was willing to relieve him of a particle of responsibility.”<sup>281</sup> True to his word, Burnside wrote Halleck on December 17: “For the failure in the attack I am responsible . . . . The fact that I decided to move from Warrenton onto this line rather against the opinion of the President, Secretary, and yourself, and that you have left the whole management in my hands, without giving me orders, makes me the more responsible.”<sup>282</sup> Burnside submitted this document to the newspapers, which circulated it widely.

Not everyone was willing to exonerate the president. Ohio journalist Whitelaw Reid said that either Halleck or Burnside might be blamed, “but ABRAHAM LINCOLN was Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy! From that sad fact, and from its logical

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<sup>278</sup> W. K. Strong to Samuel R. Curtis, New York, 23 December 1862, Curtis Papers, Yale University.

<sup>279</sup> Julia Lorrillard Butterfield, ed., A Biographical Memorial of General Daniel Butterfield (New York: Grafton Press, 1904), 159.

<sup>280</sup> Washington correspondence, 25 December, New York Times, 26 December 1862.

<sup>281</sup> “Excerpts from the Journal of Henry J. Raymond,” Scribner's Monthly, 19 (January 1880), 424.

<sup>282</sup> OR, I, 21:66.

sequences, there was no escape!”<sup>283</sup> Moncure Conway declared that the “disasters have root in the White House.”<sup>284</sup> After speaking with numerous members of Congress, military men, Radicals, and Conservatives, William M. Dickson reported that “all united in ascribing to the President the honor of being the author of all our calamities. His imbecility, vacillation, meddling interference with everything, his frivolity and total incapacity of receiving or appreciating [advice] make him the most incorrigible stumbling block that God ever afflicted any nation with.”<sup>285</sup> X

As if the Fredericksburg disaster had not generated enough criticism, Lincoln’s decision to send Nathaniel P. Banks to Louisiana rather than to Burnside’s army was widely condemned.<sup>286</sup> “The Banks diversion south has disappointed the whole country,” the president observed.<sup>287</sup>

#### SENATORIAL PUTSCH ATTEMPT: THE CABINET CRISIS OF DECEMBER

In the wake of the Fredericksburg defeat, Lincoln’s popularity sank. The people of the North “have borne, silently and grimly, imbecility, treachery, failure, privation, loss of friends and means, almost every suffering which can afflict a brave people,” observed Harpers Weekly. “But they cannot be expected to suffer that such massacres as this at Fredericksburg shall be repeated.”<sup>288</sup> Benjamin Brown French gave voice to the

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<sup>283</sup> Washington correspondence by Agate [Whitelaw Reid], 19 December, Cincinnati Gazette, 22 December 1862.

<sup>284</sup> Washington correspondence, 16 January 1862, Boston Commonwealth, 24 January 1863.

<sup>285</sup> W. M. Dickson to Friedrich Hassaurek, Cincinnati, 31 December 1862, Hassaurek Papers, Ohio Historical Society.

<sup>286</sup> David Davis to Leonard Swett, Washington, 22 December 1862, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>287</sup> W. K. Strong to Samuel R. Curtis, New York, 23 December 1862, Curtis Papers, Yale University.

<sup>288</sup> Harpers Weekly, 27 December 1862.

widespread pessimism: “Unless something occurs very soon to brighten up affairs, I shall begin to look upon our whole Nation as on its way to destruction.”<sup>289</sup>

“A year ago we laughed at the Honest Old Abe’s grotesque genial Western jocosities, but they nauseate us now,” remarked George Templeton Strong. He predicted that if things continued to go as they had been going, pressure would mount to have the president “resign and make way for Hamlin, as for one about whom nobody knows anything and who may therefore be a change for the better, none for the worse being conceivable.”<sup>290</sup> Charles Eliot Norton lamented that while the nation required leadership from “a Bengal tiger,” it had only a “domestic cat” in the White House.<sup>291</sup> Constituents told Pennsylvania Representative Edward McPherson that “almost everybody is dissatisfied with the administration. President Lincoln is denounced by many of his most devoted friends in former times.” The public was “utterly disgusted,” believing “that the present administration is utterly incompetent.” Ominously McPherson was warned that “if things are not more successfully managed the President will be generally deserted.”<sup>292</sup> Orestes A. Brownson lost all patience with Lincoln, whom he derided as a “petty politician,” “thick-headed,” “ignorant,” “tricky,” “astute in a small way,” “obstinate as a mule,” “wrong-headed,” and “ill-deserving the sobriquet of Honest.”<sup>293</sup> Lincoln was “not equal to his position,” Brownson argued; “he is not the right man in the right place. . . . It

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<sup>289</sup> Cole and McDonough eds., Witness to the Young Republic, 415.

<sup>290</sup> Nevins and Thomas, eds., Strong Diary, 3:281-282 (entry for 18 December 1862).

<sup>291</sup> Norton to George W. Curtis, Shady Hill, 12 November 1862, in Sara Norton and M. A. De Wolfe Howe, eds., Letters of Charles Eliot Norton (2 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), 1:258.

<sup>292</sup> James [Hill?] to Edward McPherson, Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, 19 December 1862; [R. G. McCreary?] to Edward McPherson, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 17 December 1862, Edward McPherson Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>293</sup> Brownson to Charles Sumner, Elizabeth, New Jersey, 26 December 1862, Sumner Papers, Harvard University.



had been better for the nation if a better man had been elected President.”<sup>294</sup> William Cullen Bryant indignantly asked: “How long is such intolerable and wicked blundering to continue?”<sup>295</sup> A correspondent for an abolitionist journal complained that Lincoln was not moved “by the yawning, bleeding wounds of the devoted, noble people – unmoved by the prayers and supplications of patriots – of his – once – friends” and instead resists with “all his might . . . any change of the mephistic influences surrounding him.”<sup>296</sup>

Lincoln might be honest and patriotic, an Indiana Republican conceded, “but I fear he is not courageous.” The administration’s “policy of ‘no policy’ . . . emboldens our southern as well as our domestic foes. A few weeks ago men would not venture to suggest openly a possible alliance with the south on the part of the northwest – now the advantages of such an alliance are unblushingly discussed. Secret political associations exist. Midnight conclaves are held – all having in view the overthrow of the government. Denunciation of New England is indulged in, and an open avowal that a union leaving her out, would be preferable to the ‘old union.’” It was “unaccountable that a government possessed of the resources that ours is, with loyal and patriotic local governments in the union states should have made so little progress in putting down this rebellion.”<sup>297</sup>

A Bostonian predicted that Lincoln’s resignation “would be received with great satisfaction” and might “avert what . . . will otherwise come viz a violent and bloody revolution at the North.”<sup>298</sup> The president was aware of such threats of violence against

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<sup>294</sup> New York World, 5 January 1863.

<sup>295</sup> New York Evening Post, 18 December 1862.

<sup>296</sup> Washington correspondence, 24 January, Boston Commonwealth, 31 January 1863.

<sup>297</sup> Thomas C. Slaughter to Henry S. Lane, Corydon, Indiana, 24 December 1862, typescript, Lane Papers, Indiana University. Slaughter had been a delegate to the Republican national convention in 1860.

<sup>298</sup> George F. Williams to Sumner, Boston, 17 December 1862, Sumner Papers, Harvard University.

him. When told that a Pennsylvanian expressed the hope that Lincoln would be hanged from a lamppost outside the White House, he remarked to Congressman William D. Kelley: “You need not be surprised to find that that suggestion has been executed any morning; the violent preliminaries to such an event would not surprise me. I have done things lately that must be incomprehensible to the people, and which cannot now be explained.”<sup>299</sup> Pennsylvania governor Andrew Curtin led a delegation of Pennsylvanians who warned Lincoln that unless there was a shakeup in the cabinet, “the people in forty days would have his head.”<sup>300</sup>

Congress too was growing disenchanted with the president. Zachariah Chandler, who regarded Lincoln as “a weak man, too weak for the occasion,” told his wife that “the country is gone unless something is done at once. Folly, folly, folly reigns supreme.”<sup>301</sup> Another Republican senator said that his colleagues would ask Lincoln “to resign if they supposed he would take the advice.” Yet another averred that the president “has fewer positive vices than most men but is strikingly without a high positive good quality.”<sup>302</sup>

In January, Senator Fessenden scornfully remarked that he had just read a letter by the King of Siam to Admiral Foote “which had more good sense in it, & a better comprehension of our troubles, . . . than Abe has had from the beginning.” At Washington “every thing wears a most gloomy aspect,” Fessenden reported. “Our financial troubles are thickening every day. Our army here is almost ruined, & melting

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<sup>299</sup> Kelley in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 276.

<sup>300</sup> Henry Winter Davis to S. F. Du Pont, n.p., 2 January 1863, transcript, S. F. Du Pont Papers, Hagley Museum, Wilmington, Delaware.

<sup>301</sup> Chandler to Lyman Trumbull, Detroit, 10 September 1862, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress; Chandler to his wife, Washington, 18 December 1862, Chandler Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>302</sup> W. M. Dickson to Friedrich Hassaurek, Cincinnati, 31 December 1862, Hassaurek Papers, Ohio Historical Society.

away rapidly, & I know not where we are to get another unless we have some great military successes. Traitors are about as thick at the North as at the South, and how soon the government will find itself without support it is hard to say.” He condemned the administration roundly: “there never was such a shambling, half & half, set of incapables collected in one government before, since the world began.”<sup>303</sup>

Rather than attack Lincoln directly, congressmen and senators, upset by the defeat at both Fredericksburg and at the polls, made Seward their scapegoat. Abolitionist John Jay foresaw a “storm rising that presently will not be stilled by any thing less than an entire reconstruction of the Cabinet.” At the very least, either Stanton or Halleck had to go, Jay insisted.<sup>304</sup> A Republican leader in Indiana argued that if Lincoln “had a strong, united, and fearless cabinet,” the “country could yet be saved.” Therefore Seward and Blair must be dismissed.<sup>305</sup> Chandler called the secretary of state “the evil genius of this Nation” and “the bane of Mr Lincoln’s administration.”<sup>306</sup> Lydia Maria Child and Joseph Medill concurred: “Seward is really President; Lincoln only nominally so,” said Child, and Medill called the secretary of state “Lincoln’s evil genius” who “has been President de facto and has kept a sponge saturated with chloroform to Uncle Abe’s nose all the while, except for one or two brief spells.”<sup>307</sup> When Seward’s alter ego, Thurlow Weed,

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<sup>303</sup> Fessenden to Elizabeth Warriner, Washington, 10, 18 January 1863, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College.

<sup>304</sup> Jay to Sumner, New York, 18 December 1862, Sumner Papers, Harvard University.

<sup>305</sup> Thomas C. Slaughter to Henry S. Lane, Corydon, Indiana, 24 December 1862, typescript, Lane Papers, Indiana University.

<sup>306</sup> Chandler to his wife, Washington 10, 18 December 1862, Chandler Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>307</sup> Lydia Maria Child to John Greenleaf Whittier, Wayland, Massachusetts, 22 September 1861, Child Papers, Library of Congress; Medill to Schuyler Colfax, n.p., n.d., O. J. Hollister, Life of Schuyler Colfax (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1886), 200.

was thought to be “advising and guiding the stolid Executive,” the “rage of the best Republicans & even of Mrs. Lincoln” was reportedly “unrestrained.”<sup>308</sup>

Anger at the secretary of state had been building for some time. When in September, 1861, some New York Republicans complained about Seward’s excessive drinking and smoking, Lincoln acknowledged the truth of their charge but added: “I have been at work with him during a whole day & evening and never knew a man more ready to take up different subjects and to master them.”<sup>309</sup> A year later, when another delegation from New York called at the White House to urge a change of policy, a “sharp encounter” developed between Lincoln and John E. Williams. Then James A. Hamilton criticized Seward’s April 10, 1861, dispatch to Charles Francis Adams. The president “in an excited manner,” interrupted: “Sir! You are subjecting some letter of Mr. Seward’s to an undue criticism in and undue manner.” Pointing to Williams and Hamilton, he added: “You gentlemen, to hang Mr. Seward, would destroy this government.” Hamilton replied: “Sir, that is a very harsh remark.”<sup>310</sup> Two months later, Thaddeus Stevens wrote that it would be “a great blessing if Seward could be removed.”<sup>311</sup>

To achieve that end, thirty-two Republican senators, with the news of the Fredericksburg debacle fresh in their minds, caucused secretly on December 16 and 17 to “to ascertain whether any steps could be taken to quiet the public mind, and to produce a better condition of affairs.” They denounced Seward bitterly “and charged him with all

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<sup>308</sup> Sam Wilkeson to Sydney Howard Gay, [Washington, ca. 19 February 1863], Gay Papers, Columbia University.

<sup>309</sup> James A. Hamilton to Hamilton Fish, Nevis, New York, 20 September 1861, Fish Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>310</sup> James A. Hamilton, Reminiscences of James A. Hamilton; or, Men and Events, At Home and Abroad, During Three Quarters of a Century (New York: C. Scribner, 1869), 529-530.

<sup>311</sup> Stevens to Simon Stevens, Lancaster, 17 November 1862, Beverly Wilson Palmer, ed., The Selected Papers of Thaddeus Stevens (2 vols.; Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997-98), 1:328.

the disasters which had come upon our arms alleging that he was opposed to a vigorous prosecution of the war – controlled the President and thwarted the other members of the Cabinet.” Lincoln, too, was criticized for failing “to consult his Cabinet councilors, as a body, upon important matters” and for appointing generals “who did not believe in the policy of the government, and had no sympathy with its purposes.” John Sherman of Ohio asserted that the problem was not the cabinet but Lincoln, who “had neither dignity order nor firmness.” Sherman proposed that they “go directly to the President, and tell him his defects.”<sup>312</sup>

The senators’ chief informant was Chase, leader of the Radical faction in the cabinet. Seward, representing the opposite end of the ideological spectrum, had triumphed over the treasury secretary in the competition to win Lincoln’s favor. As Gideon Welles put it, “Seward’s more pleasant nature and consummate skill have enabled him to get windward of Chase.” The president, Welles confided to his diary, “is fond of Seward, who is affable. He respects Chase, who is clumsy. Seward comforts him. Chase he deems a necessity.”<sup>313</sup>

The haughty Chase regarded both his cabinet colleagues and the president with lordly contempt and schemed to win the Republican presidential nomination in 1864. Chase called the secretary of state “a back-stairs influence which often controlled the apparent conclusions of the cabinet itself” and told senators that there was “no cabinet except in name. The Heads of Departments come together now and then – nominally twice a week –; but no reports are made; no regular discussions held; no ascertained

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<sup>312</sup> Pease and Randall, eds., Browning Diary, 1:597-99 (entries for 16, 17 December 1862); Fessenden, manuscript account of the 1862 cabinet crisis, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College. Fessenden’s account is the most detailed one written by a caucus participant.

<sup>313</sup> Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:203, 205 (entries for 20, 23 December 1862)

conclusions reached. Sometimes weeks pass by and no full meeting is held.”<sup>314</sup> A senator who was convinced that the cabinet squabbled fiercely said: “Take seven cats, put them together in a bag, sew up its mouth, and shake it up well – WELL, mind you – and you have the Cabinet!”<sup>315</sup>

Fully aware of these comments and criticisms, Lincoln said “he had no doubt that Chase was at the bottom of all the mischief, and was setting the radicals on to assail Seward.”<sup>316</sup> He told Frank Blair that the treasury secretary “runs the machine against me.”<sup>317</sup> The president believed that the attempted putsch was rooted in personal hostility rather than a genuine concern for the country’s welfare. Moreover, he disliked the senators’ resort to a secret caucus rather than an open debate and vote of no confidence.

After twenty-eight senators agreed on a resolution stating that “the public confidence in the present administration would be increased by a change in and partial reconstruction of the Cabinet,” they resolved to send a nine-man delegation to Lincoln.<sup>318</sup> They had toned down their criticism of Seward lest they make a martyr of him.<sup>319</sup> Upon learning the results of the caucus, Seward said: “They may do as they please about me,

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<sup>314</sup> Fessenden, manuscript account of the 1862 cabinet crisis, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College; John Niven, Salmon P. Chase: A Biography (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 310; Chase to Zachariah Chandler, 20 September 1862, Niven, ed., Chase Papers, 2:275-276.

<sup>315</sup> Washington correspondence by Agate [Whitelaw Reid], 20 December, Cincinnati Gazette, 23 December 1862.

<sup>316</sup> Pease and Randall, eds., Browning Diary, 1:602 (entry for 19 December 1862).

<sup>317</sup> Frank Blair to his father, n.d., Blair-Lee Papers, Princeton University, in Nevins, War for the Union, 2:336.

<sup>318</sup> Fessenden, manuscript account of the 1862 cabinet crisis, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College. The resolution was written by Ira Harris of New York and amended by Fessenden. The senators approving it were Anthony, Browning, Chandler, Clark, Collamer, Cowan, Dixon, Doolittle, Fessenden, Foster, Field, Grimes, Hale, Harlan, Harris, Howard, Howe, Lane of Indiana, Lane of Kansas, Morrill, Pomeroy, Sherman, Sumner, Trumbull, Wilmot, Wade, Wilkinson, and Wilson. King abstained. Foot and Ten Eyck, who were absent, were understood to favor the resolution.

<sup>319</sup> David Davis to Leonard Swett, Washington, 22 December 1862, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

but they shall not put the President in a false position on my account.” He promptly wrote a letter of resignation. Upon reading it, Lincoln “looked up with a face full of pain and surprise.” He was “awfully shaken” and urged Seward to reconsider, but the New Yorker blandly remarked that “he must be excused from holding any conversation with him upon the subject of his resignation: – that it was based on what seemed to be a unanimous expression of the opinion on the part of the Republican Senators that he ought no longer to hold the place: – that the President knew better than any other man how far the assumptions on which their actions rested were true: – that he had no explanation to offer and certainly none to ask: – that so far as his personal feeling were concerned, the happiest day of his life would be that which should release him honorably, and without any unmanly shrinking from labor or responsibility, from public office.” Lincoln replied: “Ah, yes, Governor, that will do very well for you, but I am like the starling in Sterne’s story, ‘I can’t get out.’”<sup>320</sup>

For Lincoln, this was one of the darkest days of the war. He told Browning: “Since I heard last night of the proceedings of the caucus I have been more distressed than by any event of my life.” The Radical senators, he said, “wish to get rid of me, and I am sometimes half disposed to gratify them.” In despair, he added: “We are now on the brink of destruction. It appears to me the Almighty is against us, and I can hardly see a ray of hope.” Dismayed at the allegations against Seward, the president wondered: “Why will men believe a lie, an absurd lie, that could not impose upon a child, and cling to it

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<sup>320</sup> Frederick Seward, William H. Seward: An Autobiography from 1801 to 1834 with a Memoir of his Life, and Selections from His Letters (3 vols.; New York: Derby and Miller, 1891), 2:146-47; Sam Wilkeson to Sydney Howard Gay, [Washington, 19 December 1862], Gay Papers, Columbia University; Washington correspondence, 20 December, New York Times, 22 December 1862.

and repeat it in defiance of all evidence to the contrary?” But he would not be bullied, saying “with a good deal of emphasis” that “he was master.”<sup>321</sup>

On December 18, Lincoln met from 7 to 10 p.m. with the senatorial delegation, which consisted of Jacob Collamer of Vermont, spokesman for the group; Charles Sumner, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee; Benjamin Wade, chairman of the Congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War; William Pitt Fessenden of Maine; Ira Harris of New York; Lyman Trumbull of Illinois; Samuel C. Pomeroy of Kansas; James M. Howard of Michigan; and James W. Grimes of Iowa. Collamer began by reading a paper summarizing their grievances and suggestions. Among other things, it contained the startling implication that “all important public measures and appointments” should be made by presidents only after obtaining the consent of a cabinet majority.<sup>322</sup>

The senators then had a “pretty free and animated conversation” with the president, who listened respectfully and “with his usual urbanity” to their complaints about the lack of unity in the cabinet, the failure of Lincoln to consult its members, and the need for a vigorous prosecution of the war by generals sympathetic to the administration. They charged Seward with “indifference, with want of earnestness in the War, with want of sympathy with the country in this great struggle, and with many things objectionable, and especially with a too great ascendancy and control of the President and measures of administration.”

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<sup>321</sup> Pease and Randall, eds., Browning Diary, 1:600-1, 604 (entries for 18 and 22 December 1862).

<sup>322</sup> The second point of the document reads contained this sentence: “The theory of our government, and the early and uniform practical construction thereof, is, that the President should be aided by a Cabinet Council, agreeing with him in political principles and general policy, and that all important public measures and appointments should be the result of their combined wisdom and deliberation.” Fessenden, manuscript account of the 1862 cabinet crisis, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College.



In reply, the president “stated how this movement had shocked and grieved him; that the Cabinet he had selected in view of impending difficulties and of all the responsibilities upon himself; that he and the members had gone on harmoniously, whatever had been their previous party feelings and associations; that there had never been serious disagreements, though there had been differences; that in the overwhelming troubles of the country, which had borne heavily upon him, he had been sustained and consoled by the good feeling and the mutual and unselfish confidence and zeal that pervaded the Cabinet.”<sup>323</sup>

“What the country wanted,” Lincoln said, “was military success. Without that nothing could go right: – with that nothing could go wrong. He did not yet see how the measure proposed by the Committee would furnish the remedy required: if he had a Cabinet of angels they could not give the country military successes, and that what was wanted and what must be had.”<sup>324</sup>

When the dyspeptic Senator William P. Fessenden of Maine raised McClellan’s complaint about the administration’s failure to support the Army of the Potomac properly, Lincoln read several of his letters to Little Mac showing how well that general had been sustained. Sumner laced into Seward, denouncing his official correspondence, “averring that he had subjected himself to ridicule in diplomatic circles, at home and abroad – that he had uttered sentiments offensive to Congress, and spoke of it repeatedly with disrespect, in the presence of foreign ministers – that he had written offensive

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<sup>323</sup> Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:195 (entry for 20 December 1862); Fessenden, manuscript account of the 1862 cabinet crisis, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College; Washington correspondence, 21 December, New York Tribune, 22 December 1862.

<sup>324</sup> Washington correspondence by [Henry J.] R[aymond], 20 December, New York Times, 22 December 1862. Raymond’s authorship of this long dispatch is confirmed in the Washington correspondence by Willis, 22 December, Cincinnati Gazette, 29 December 1862.

despatches which the President could not have seen, or assented to.” The Massachusetts senator cited as an example a dispatch which the indiscreet secretary of state had allowed to be published a few days earlier, stating that “the extreme advocates of African slavery and its most vehement opponents were acting in concert together to precipitate a servile war – the former by making the most desperate attempt to overthrow the federal Union, the latter by demanding an edict of universal emancipation.” Lincoln replied that “it was Mr. Seward’s habit to read his despatches to him before they were sent,” that “they were not usually submitted to a Cabinet Council,” and that he “did not recollect that [one] to which Mr Sumner alluded.” In conclusion he “said he would carefully examine and consider the paper submitted” and “expressed his satisfaction with the tone & temper of the Committee.” Seemingly “in cheerful spirits” and “pleased with the interview,” he invited them to return on the morrow.<sup>325</sup>

Rumors swirled through the capital as people feared that “the very material for a coup d’etat” was underway. When Nicolay set foot in the House of Representatives, he answered the “scores of questions that assailed him,” hardly pretending to “conceal that the crisis had come, and that the whole Administration seemed undergoing a revolution.”<sup>326</sup> The chief justice of the Massachusetts supreme court viewed the senators’ action “as Revolutionary in its tendencies and so far second only to the Southern Rebellion.” A Boston merchant regarded the loss at Fredericksburg “as a trifle in

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<sup>325</sup> Fessenden, manuscript account of the 1862 cabinet crisis, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College. It is not clear whether Seward read all important dispatches to Lincoln before sending them. See James W. White to Lyman Trumbull, New York 28 February 1863, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress, and White to Jacob Collamer et al., New York, 6 March 1863, Fessenden Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society.

<sup>326</sup> Washington correspondence by Whitelaw Reid, 19 December 1862, Smart, ed., Agate Dispatches, 1:244.

comparison of this truly unfortunate & disgraceful proceeding.”<sup>327</sup> A leading Republican journalist reported that the “cooler and wiser of our people dread the probable consequence of an assault upon the Administration – the driving of the President into the arms of Vallandigham & Co.”<sup>328</sup>

Next morning, Lincoln summoned the cabinet, minus Seward, and recounted what had transpired. The senatorial delegation had been, he said, “earnest and sad – not malicious nor passionate – not denouncing any one, but all of them attributing to Mr. S[eward] a lukewarmness in the conduct of the war, and seeming to consider him the real cause of our failures.” Though “they believed in the Pres[iden]t’s honesty, they seemed to think that when he had in him any good purposes, Mr. S[eward] contrived to suck them out of him unperceived.” Lincoln, “evidently distressed,” urged the cabinet not to quit and, according to Edward Bates, “said he could not afford to lose us” for he “did not see how he could get along with any new cabinet, made of new materials.”<sup>329</sup> The president asked them to reconvene that evening when the senators would again call. Chase, who realized that he would be put in a delicate position, tried to excuse himself from attending, but because all his colleagues agreed to be there, he felt compelled to join them.<sup>330</sup> It proved to be an ingenious tactical stroke on Lincoln’s part.

On the fateful night of December 19, the senators returned to the White House, where Lincoln opened the four-hour session by stating “that he had invited the Cabinet,

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<sup>327</sup> Philo S. Shelton to Thurlow Weed, Boston, 24 December 1862, Weed Papers, University of Rochester.

<sup>328</sup> Samuel Wilkeson to Sidney Howard Gay, [Washington, late December 1862], Gay Papers, Columbia University.

<sup>329</sup> Howard K. Beale, ed., The Diary of Edward Bates, 1859-1866 (Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1930, vol. IV; Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1933), 269 (entry for 19 December 1862).

<sup>330</sup> Niven, Chase, 311.

with the exception of Mr Seward, to meet the Committee for a free and friendly conversation, in which all, including the President, should be on equal terms – and he desired to know if the Committee had any objection to talk over matter with the Cabinet.” Taken by surprise, they raised no objection, though it would be awkward for them to make their case in the presence of Chase, their main informant.<sup>331</sup> Lincoln “with some mild severity” (and somewhat inaccurately) spoke at length “of the unity of his Cabinet, and how, though they could not be expected to think and speak alike on all subjects, all had acquiesced in measures when once decided. The necessities of the times, he said, had prevented frequent and long sessions of the Cabinet, and the submission of every question at the meetings.”<sup>332</sup> He asserted “that most questions of importance had received a reasonable consideration,” though he cited “several instances in which most important action was had not only without consultation with his Cabinet, but without the knowledge of several [of its members] -- such as the appointment of Generals McClellan & Halleck - - the sending for Genl. Halleck to act as Commander in Chief -- placing the army under McLellan’s command after his return from the Peninsula -- and the Banks expedition.” Yet, he said, he “was not aware of any divisions or want of unity. Decisions had, so far as he knew, received general support after they were made. He thought Mr Seward had been earnest in the prosecution of the war, and had not improperly interfered – had generally read him his official correspondence, and had sometimes consulted with Mr Chase.” When Lincoln asked the cabinet “to say whether there had been any want of unity, or of sufficient consultation,” Chase found himself on the spot.<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Fessenden, manuscript account of the 1862 cabinet crisis, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College.

<sup>332</sup> Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:196 (entry for 20 December 1862).

<sup>333</sup> Fessenden, manuscript account of the 1862 cabinet crisis, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College.

All eyes turned toward the treasury secretary, who “seemed offended” and “very angry.”<sup>334</sup> He stated “that he should not have come here had he known that he was to be arraigned before a Committee of the Senate.” Reluctantly acknowledging that “there had been no want of unity in the Cabinet, but a general acquiescence on public measures,” he endorsed the president’s statement “fully and entirely.” Rather equivocally he said that he “regretted that there was not a more full and thorough consideration and canvass of every important measure in open Cabinet.”<sup>335</sup>

The senators, having often heard Chase bemoan the lack of cabinet unanimity and consultation, were astounded. The duplicitous treasury secretary felt humiliated. Replying to the charge that the committee was “arraigning” Chase, Fessenden “with much warmth” remarked: “It was no movement of ours, nor did we suspect that we came here for that purpose.” Welles thought the Maine senator “was skillful, but a little tart; felt, it could be seen, more than he cared to say.”<sup>336</sup>

When Lincoln asked if he should accept Seward’s resignation, the senators were divided. Chase’s backpedaling led Collamer and Howard to abstain and Harris to abandon his opposition to the secretary of state. Sumner, Pomeroy, Grimes, Fessenden, and Trumbull persisted in their anti-Seward stance. (Wade was out of town, visiting the front with the Committee on the Conduct of the War.) Lincoln remarked “that he had reason to fear ‘a general smash-up’ if Mr Seward was removed, and he did not see how

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<sup>334</sup> Beale, ed., Bates Diary, 270 (entry for 19 December 1862); Washington correspondence by James W. Simonton, 26 December 1862, San Francisco Daily Bulletin, 21 January 1863.

<sup>335</sup> Francis Fessenden, Life and Public Services of William Pitt Fessenden (2 vols.; Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1907), 2:236, 238.

<sup>336</sup> Washington correspondence, 21 December, New York Herald, 22 December 1862; Fessenden, manuscript account of the 1862 cabinet crisis, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College; Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 197 (entry for 20 December 1862).

he could get along with an entire change in his Cabinet.” He “thought Mr. Chase would seize the occasion to withdraw, and it had been intimated that Mr Stanton would do the same -- and he could not dispense with Mr Chase’s services in the Treasury just at this time.” At 1 a.m., the meeting broke up inconclusively.<sup>337</sup>

Next day, Welles, who thought “Seward’s foibles are not serious failings,” urged the president to reject the senatorial advice about the secretary of state and about compromising the independence of the executive branch. Lincoln, “much gratified,” replied that if the delegation’s scheme were adopted, “the whole Government must cave in. It could not stand, could not hold water; the bottom would be out.” The navy secretary, with Lincoln’s blessing, hastened to Seward and urged him to withdraw his resignation. It is not clear just what message Lincoln had Welles convey to Seward. According to one report, the president “said that, although his [Seward’s] feelings and interests perhaps dictated his withdrawal from the Cabinet at this juncture, patriotism required him to stay and help him through his administration; and inasmuch as his persistence in leaving would deprive him of the services of a Secretary of the Treasury on whom he leaned, he was doubly bound to reconsider his determination.”<sup>338</sup> Seward agreed, though he was disappointed that Lincoln “did not promptly refuse to consider his resignation, and dismiss, or refuse to parley with, the committee.”<sup>339</sup>

Meanwhile, Chase decided to quit, explaining to Fessenden that “Seward and he came into the Cabinet as representing two wings of the Republican party, and if he remained he might be accused of maneuvering to get Mr Seward out – and he thought he

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<sup>337</sup> Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:196-198 (entry for 20 December 1862); Fessenden, manuscript account of the 1862 cabinet crisis, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College.

<sup>338</sup> Washington correspondence, 22 December, New York Tribune, 23 December 1862.

<sup>339</sup> Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:199-201 (entry for 20 December 1862).

ought to relieve the President of any embarrassment, if he desired to reconstruct the Cabinet.” He added “That Mr Seward’s withdrawal would embarrass him so much that he could not get along with the Treasury. He found that very difficult as it was – and if he had to contend with the disaffection of Mr Seward’s friends the load would be more than he could carry.”<sup>340</sup>

With his resignation letter in hand, Chase met with Lincoln, Stanton, and Welles. The treasury secretary “said he had been painfully affected by the meeting last evening, which was a total surprise to him, and, after some not very explicit remarks as to how he was affected, informed the President he had prepared his resignation.”

Lincoln’s eyes lit up and he asked: “Where is it?”

“I brought it with me,” said Chase. “I wrote it this morning.”

“Let me have it,” said the president as he reached for the document, which its author hesitated to surrender.

Eagerly Lincoln ripped open the envelope. “This cuts the Gordian knot,” he said, laughing triumphantly. “I can dispose of this subject now without difficulty. I see my way clear.”

Stanton then offered to submit his resignation. “You may go to your Department,” replied the president. “I don’t want yours.” Holding out Chase’s letter, he said: “This is all I want; this relieves me; my way is clear; the trouble is ended. I will detain neither of you longer.” Chase, “moody and taciturn,” left with Welles.<sup>341</sup> Soon thereafter, Lincoln told a member of the senatorial committee: “Now I can ride: I have a pumpkin in each

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<sup>340</sup> Fessenden, manuscript account of the 1862 cabinet crisis, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College.

<sup>341</sup> Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:201-2 (entry for 20 December 1862).

end of my bag.”<sup>342</sup> (Another source reported that Lincoln said: “Now I have the biggest half of the hog.”)<sup>343</sup>

When word of Chase’s action leaked out, a senator exclaimed to Lincoln: “What is this? I hear that Chase has resigned too. That will never do; we can’t spare him from the Treasury. Seward’s the man we want out.” Lincoln replied: “Sir, I have made up my mind that one shall not go out without both, and you gentlemen may as well understand that at once!”<sup>344</sup> Similarly, when the editor of the Washington Chronicle, John W. Forney, said “‘that he hoped the President would not let Mr. Chase resign,’ and added, ‘nor Mr. Seward,’” Lincoln “paused and reddened, then said suddenly, ‘If one goes, the other must; they must hunt in couples.’”<sup>345</sup>

(Months later, in response to yet another assault on Seward, the president remarked “that it would not do to dismiss him without dismissing Chase also, because, whether rightfully or wrongly, the people regarded them as representatives of the two wings of the party, the Radicals and the Conservatives, and ‘we can’t afford to ignore either wing, for that would sort the party down to altogether too small a heap.’”)<sup>346</sup>

In fact, the president did not intend that either man should resign. He let it be known “that he could not permit the idea to go out to the country now that the Cabinet

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<sup>342</sup> Ira Harris told this to Fredrick W. Seward. Seward interviewed by Nicolay, 9 January 1879, in Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 87.

<sup>343</sup> Fessenden, manuscript account of the 1862 cabinet crisis, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College.

<sup>344</sup> Washington correspondence by Agate [Whitelaw Reid], 22 December, Cincinnati Gazette, 25 December 1862.

<sup>345</sup> Madeleine Vinton Dahlgren, Memoir of John A. Dahlgren, Rear-Admiral United States Navy (Boston: J. R. Osgood, 1882), 383 (diary entry for 22 December 1862).

<sup>346</sup> Washington correspondence by Agate [Whitelaw Reid], 26 March, Cincinnati Gazette, scrapbook, Reid Family Papers, Library of Congress.



was divided.”<sup>347</sup> On December 20, he wrote to both Seward and Chase asking them to withdraw their resignations and “resume the duties of your Departments respectively.”<sup>348</sup> Seward agreed promptly, but Chase repeated the temporizing act he had engaged in two years earlier when Lincoln offered him the treasury portfolio.

As Lincoln awaited Chase’s response, the capital buzzed with rumors. “To-day has been the gloomiest of all the days in the history of the nation in Washington,” wrote a journalist on Sunday, December 21. “The most prominent men here assert that the disease of the nation is at its crisis, and the events to be determined to-night will fix the destinies of the country.”<sup>349</sup> William P. Fessenden lamented that “such a curious compound is our good Abraham that no one knows how it will eventuate. His attachment to individuals, and his tenderness of heart are fatal to his efficiency in times like these.” Moreover, the senator added, Lincoln lacked “dignity, order, and vigor – three terrible defects.”<sup>350</sup> Opponents of the administration rejoiced at the prospect of its impending breakup; friends of McClellan expressed confidence that their hero would be reinstated as commander of the Army of the Potomac and would, as the price of his acceptance, insist on control of all armies.<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> Washington correspondence by Whitelaw Reid, 22 December 1862, Smart, ed., Agate Dispatches, 1:253.

<sup>348</sup> Lincoln to Seward and Chase, Washington, 20 December 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:12.

<sup>349</sup> Washington correspondence, 21 December, New York Herald, 22 December 1862.

<sup>350</sup> Fessenden to Elizabeth Warriner, Washington, 20-21 December 1861; Fessenden to his father, Washington, 20 December 1862, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College.

<sup>351</sup> Beale, ed., Bates Diary, 270 (entry for 20 December 1862). On December 17, Francis P. Blair, Sr., had recommended that step to the president. Blair to Lincoln, Washington, 18 December 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

On December 22, conservative hopes were dashed when Chase grudgingly consented to remain at his post.<sup>352</sup> The secretary's credibility and prestige were badly damaged. Later, Orville Browning asked Jacob Collamer how Chase "could venture to make such a statement in the presence of Senators to whom he had said that Seward exercised a back stair and malign influence upon the President, and thwarted all the measures of the Cabinet." Bluntly Collamer responded: "He lied."<sup>353</sup> Disgusted with Chase, Stanton on December 20 told Fessenden that "what the Senators had said about the manner of doing business in the Cabinet was true, and he did not mean to lie about it." The war secretary added "that he was ashamed of Chase, for he knew better." Caleb B. Smith told Fessenden much the same thing.<sup>354</sup>

As Stanton and Smith acknowledged, the senators were right in thinking that the cabinet lacked harmony and was often ignored when important decisions were made. Personal antagonisms were strong. Blair called Seward an "unprincipled liar."<sup>355</sup> Bates and Welles held similar views of the secretary of state. Chase regarded him as an archenemy. They all resented Seward's toplofty condescension, his meddling in their affairs, and his intimacy with the president.

But the senators' belief, nurtured by Chase, that the secretary of state dominated Lincoln was inaccurate. "Seward knows that I am his master," the president told an army chaplain.<sup>356</sup> Indeed, he was master of the cabinet in general. John Hay marveled at the "tyrannous authority" with which Lincoln "rules the Cabinet," for he decided the "most

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<sup>352</sup> Chase to Lincoln, Washington, 22 December 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>353</sup> Pease and Randall, eds., Browning Diary, 1:603 (entry for 22 December 1862).

<sup>354</sup> Fessenden, manuscript account of the 1862 cabinet crisis, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College.

<sup>355</sup> Beale, ed., Bates Diary, 291 (entry for 10 May 1863).

<sup>356</sup> John Eaton, Grant, Lincoln, and the Freedmen (New York: Longmans, Green, 1907), 178.

important things” and “there is no cavil.” Hay wrote a friend that the “trash you read every day about wrangles in the Cabinet about measures of state policy looks very silly from an inside view, where Abraham Rex is the central figure continually. I wish you could see as I do, that he is devilish near an autocrat in this Administration.”<sup>357</sup>

Fessenden complained that the “Senate movement would have delivered the nation, but for the weak squeamishness of our friend Chase, who, as the head of his Department is certainly able, but wants nerve and force as a Cabinet Minister. He will never be forgiven by many for deliberately sacrificing his friends to the fear of offending his & their enemies.”<sup>358</sup>

Lincoln’s adroit handling of the senatorial putsch greatly strengthened his control over the administration. With an ingenious tactical stroke, he had successfully weathered one of the gravest political crises of the war. Months later, reviewing these dramatic events, he told John Hay: “I do not now see how it could have been done better. I am sure it was right. If I had yielded to that storm & dismissed Seward the thing would all have slumped over one way & we should have been left with a scanty handful of supporters. When Chase sent in his resignation I saw that the game was in my own hands & I put it through.”<sup>359</sup> Seward detected a positive aspect to the cabinet crisis. “Perhaps it is not unfortunate that it occurred,” he wrote a friend on December 22. “Like the Trent affair it ought to be regarded as a proof of the stability of the country.”<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> Hay to Nicolay, Washington, 7 August 1863, in Michael Burlingame, ed., At Lincoln’s Side: John Hay’s Civil War Correspondence and Selected Writings (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 49-50.

<sup>358</sup> Fessenden to J. S. Pike, Portland, Maine, 5 April 1863, Pike Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>359</sup> Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 104 (entry for 30 October 1863).

<sup>360</sup> Seward to Richard M. Blatchford, Washington, 22 December [1862], Lincoln Collection, Yale University.

That day Lincoln was not so philosophical, telling John A. Dahlgren: “It was very well to talk of remodelling the Cabinet, but the caucus had thought more of their plans than of his benefit, and he told them so.”<sup>361</sup> (In general, the president tried to be fair to critics and wanted them to be fair in return. He explained that whenever he confronted a difficult case, “I always try to understand both sides, and begin by putting myself into the shoes of the party against whom I feel a prejudice; but then I expect that party to get into mine, so that he may also feel my responsibility.”)<sup>362</sup>

The outcome of the cabinet crisis disgusted the Radicals, who seemed “chopfallen and disgusted.”<sup>363</sup> One of them complained bitterly that the “chief fault of all our public men is that they are cowards. Lincoln is the chiefest among them – the cowards – but Seward is after all not much more cowardly than Chase and the senators. Mr. Lincoln is afraid to make over his cabinet – afraid to lose Seward and Chase. But he is no worse than the senators, for they no sooner made mischief than they were frightened at their own work.”<sup>364</sup> Hannibal Hamlin expressed disappointment in the result of the senatorial putsch but predicted that at least “there will be more of energy in all the departments,” which Lincoln himself needed. Hamlin “deeply lamented” that “the President has not more of energy in his character – a little of Henry Clay or Andrew Jackson. But so it is. He is as God made him.” The vice-president confidently expected

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<sup>361</sup> Dahlgren, Memoir, 383-84.

<sup>362</sup> Column by “Occasional” (John W. Forney), Washington Sunday Chronicle, 3 December 1865.

<sup>363</sup> Washington correspondence by M. D. C., 22 December, New York Evening Express, 23 December 1862.

<sup>364</sup> Washington correspondence by Van [D. W. Bartlett], 23 December, Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 25 December 1862.

the administration to display “far more energy” and to achieve “better results.”<sup>365</sup> Fessenden remarked that if “all men upon whom we have a right to rely [had] proved brave & true and forgotten themselves in their love of country, I think it [the putsch attempt] would have been productive of great good.” He was especially disappointed at “the weak squeamishness of our friend Chase,” who, he said, lacks “nerve and force.” Fessenden predicted that the treasury secretary “will never be forgiven by many for deliberately sacrificing his friends to the fear of offending his & their enemies. To him it is owing that the Cabinet remains as it is – admitted by him to be weak, divided, vacillating and powerless.” But, the senator acknowledged, Lincoln “thinks he cannot get along without Seward, and, really, it would be very difficult to supply his place at this juncture. For, though I have little confidence in him, still he represents a great and powerful army of friends.” Moreover the country’s “foreign affairs are too complicated” to entrust to a new man.<sup>366</sup>

Some Radicals were not through attacking Seward.<sup>367</sup> On December 22, Zachariah Chandler told the governor of Michigan that “Old Abe promises to stand firm & I think he will. We shall get rid of his evil genius Gov S. eventually, if not now. He can’t withstand the pressure long and without him Old Abe is naturally right.”<sup>368</sup> Six weeks later, the senator was less complimentary of the president. “The Cabinet is weak &

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<sup>365</sup> Hamlin to Israel Washburn, Washington, 24 December 1862, Washburn Family Papers, Washburn Memorial Library, Norlands, Maine.

<sup>366</sup> William P. Fessenden to his son William, Washington, 21 December 1862; Fessenden to his father, Washington, 20 December 1862, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College; Fessenden to J. S. Pike, Portland, 5 April 1863, Pike Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>367</sup> Washington correspondence by M. D. C., 22 December, New York Evening Express, 23 December 1862; James W. White to William Butler, Washington, 12 January 1863, Butler Papers, Chicago History Museum; William Cullen Bryant to William P. Fessenden, New York, 12 January 1863, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, New-York Historical Society.

<sup>368</sup> Chandler to Austin Blair, Washington, 22 December 1862, Blair Papers, Detroit Public Library.

Lincoln weaker,” he complained to his wife.<sup>369</sup> At that same time, Henry Wilson predicted “that unless things are amended instantly the Senate will in open session denounce the traitorous Secretary – and after[ward] denounce and part from the President unless he removes him.”<sup>370</sup>

Egging the Radicals on, Mrs. Lincoln remarked “that unless Seward was dismissed, the country would be ruined within three months.”<sup>371</sup> In January 1863, she loudly announced that “she regretted the making up of the family quarrel,” and that except for Montgomery Blair “there was not a member of the Cabinet who did not stab her husband & the Country daily.” She acknowledged that “she did not know anything about Politics – but here instincts told her that much.”<sup>372</sup> In March, she invited Chandler and Wade to confer with her about Seward.<sup>373</sup> (In 1865, Chandler spoke at length to the First Lady and reported that she “hates him [Seward] worse than ever & says the feeling is mutual.”)<sup>374</sup>

In March, a colonel accurately observed that “Abe holds on with the pertinacity of a Bull dog” in the face of demands for cabinet changes.<sup>375</sup> When two New York Radical leaders, David Dudley Field and George Opdyke, called at the White House to demand the secretary of state’s resignation, he rebuked them. “For once in my life,” Lincoln

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<sup>369</sup> Chandler to his wife, Washington, 10 February 1863, Chandler Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>370</sup> Samuel Wilkeson to Sidney Howard Gay, [Washington, ca. 21 February 1863], Gay Papers, Columbia University.

<sup>371</sup> Samuel Wilkeson to Sidney Howard Gay, [Washington, ca. 21 February 1863], Gay Papers, Columbia University.

<sup>372</sup> Elizabeth Blair Lee to her husband, Silver Spring, 14 January 1863, Laas, ed., Letters of Elizabeth Blair Lee, 231.

<sup>373</sup> Chandler to his wife, Washington, 31 March 1863, Chandler Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>374</sup> Chandler to his wife, Washington, 17 February 1865, Chandler Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>375</sup> Col. John Wesley Turner to Adam Badeau, New York, 12 March 1863, Schoff Civil War Collection, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

confessed to John Hay, “I rather gave my temper the rein and I talked to those men pretty Damned plainly.”<sup>376</sup> He told them that “the Government was better informed as to the necessities of the country than outsiders could be, no matter how able or intelligent.”<sup>377</sup> Noah Brooks reported that the president “is exceedingly lo[a]th to give up his [Seward’s] wise and conservative counsels, and retains him against the wishes of a respectably large faction of his own party friends, merely because he believes that to his far-seeing and astute judgment the Administration has owed more than one deliverance from a very tight place.” In addition, the policy of the secretary of state has “always been of a character to avoid all things which might result in a divided North, and though it may have been too emollient at times, it has resulted in retaining to the Administration its cohesive strength, when it would have driven off its friends by following the more arbitrary and rash measures of Stanton.”<sup>378</sup>

Amid the December cabinet imbroglio, one change was made, but not in deference to congressional pressure. Secretary of the Interior Caleb B. Smith, in poor health and out of sympathy with the administration’s emancipation policy, accepted a federal judgeship in his home state of Indiana.<sup>379</sup> In September, he had complained that “the President does not consult his Cabinet about the conduct of the war” and bitterly observed that “he might as well have no Cabinet.” For many months, Lincoln had ignored the cabinet majority calling for Buell’s dismissal. “I am desponding and almost

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<sup>376</sup> Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 105 (entry for 30 October 1863).

<sup>377</sup> Washington correspondence, 18 January, New York Times, 19 January 1863.

<sup>378</sup> Washington correspondence, 20 May, Sacramento Daily Union, 12 June 1863, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 53.

<sup>379</sup> Caleb B. Smith to Lincoln, Washington, 12 November 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

despairing,” Smith confided to Thurlow Weed.<sup>380</sup> David Davis, who had lobbied hard to have Smith named to the cabinet, wrote that the interior secretary “repels me very much. There can be neither heart nor sincerity about him & he cannot be a man of any convictions.” Ruefully he confessed to Leonard Swett: “We made a great mistake in urging [him] . . . for a cabinet appointment.”<sup>381</sup>

To fill Smith’s place Lincoln chose another Hoosier, Assistant Secretary of the Interior John Palmer Usher, who had vigorously supported colonization.<sup>382</sup> (The president reportedly wanted to name Holt, but Radicals objected strongly.)<sup>383</sup> Usher was a longtime friend of Lincoln from his days on the Eighth Judicial Circuit and reportedly handled much of the president’s legal business once he left Illinois for Washington.<sup>384</sup> His appointment may have been designed in part to alleviate anxiety about the results of the impending Emancipation Proclamation. In his annual message, the president had stated “I cannot make it better known than it already is, that I strongly favor colonization,” and in the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation he pledged that the “effort to colonize persons of African descent, with their consent, upon this continent, or elsewhere, with the previously obtained consent of the Governments existing there, will be continued.” Naming Usher might reassure skeptics that plans to colonize the freedmen would be pursued. Usher had helped plot strategy to win approval for the Chiriqui plan, emphasizing that colonization would help “show that there will be no danger of an

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<sup>380</sup> Caleb B. Smith to Thurlow Weed, Washington, 29 September 1862, Weed Papers, University of Rochester.

<sup>381</sup> Davis to Swett, Washington, 26 November 1862, in King, Davis, 204.

<sup>382</sup> Washington correspondence, 7 November, New York Times, 8 November 1862.

<sup>383</sup> David Davis to Leonard Swett, Washington, 22 December 1862, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>384</sup> R. M. H. to the editor, Washington, 21 January 1862, Indianapolis Journal, 25 January 1862.



influx” of blacks northward.<sup>385</sup> The appointment also pleased Indiana Moderates, like Senator Henry S. Lane, but did not sit well with his Radical colleagues, who fought the nomination. The New York Tribune protested that Usher was too little known for such an important post. More famous was Congressman Schuyler Colfax, but it was rightly anticipated that if gave up his seat in Congress, a Democrat would replace him. Despite strong opposition, Usher was confirmed with the help of Northwestern senators who feared that Joseph Holt might otherwise be named.<sup>386</sup>

#### CONDOLER-IN-CHIEF: COMFORTING FANNY McCULLOUGH

In the midst of the turmoil created by the defeat at Fredericksburg, the impending issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, and the cabinet crisis, Lincoln took time to pen a letter of condolence to the grief-stricken daughter of his friend, Lieutenant Colonel William McCullough. The colonel, who had served as sheriff and clerk of the courts in Bloomington, Illinois, was killed in action on December 5. His twenty-one-year-old daughter, “a guileless, truthful, warm hearted, noble girl” who suffered from a nervous condition, was shattered by the bad news.<sup>387</sup> She spent her days “in pacing the floor in violent grief, or sitting in lethargic silence.”<sup>388</sup>

When the president, who was warmly attached to McCullough and felt his loss keenly, learned of her condition, he offered her moving (and revealing) advice and

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<sup>385</sup> Usher to R. W. Thompson, Washington, 25 July 1862, Thompson Papers, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis.

<sup>386</sup> Elmo R. Richardson and Alan W. Farley, John Palmer Usher, Lincoln’s Secretary of the Interior (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1960), 27-30. Colfax barely won reelection in 1862, squeaking by with a majority of only 229 votes. Colfax to John Sherman, South Bend, 27 October 1862, John Sherman Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>387</sup> David Davis to Laura Swett, Washington, 21 December 1862, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. See also Leonard Swett to W. W. Orme, Bloomington, 9 December 1862, Orme Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>388</sup> Laura R. Swett to David Davis, Bloomington, 13 December 1862, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

comfort: “It is with deep grief that I learn of the death of your kind and brave Father, and, especially, that it is affecting your young heart beyond what is common in such cases. In this sad world of ours, sorrow comes to all; and, to the young, it comes with bitterest agony, because it takes them unawares. The older have learned to ever expect it. I am anxious to afford some alleviation of your present distress. Perfect relief is not possible, except with time. You can not now realize that you will ever feel better. Is not this so? And yet it is a mistake. You are sure to be happy again. To know this, which is certainly true, will make you some less miserable now. I have had experience enough to know what I say; and you need only to believe it, to feel better at once. The memory of your dear Father, instead of an agony, will yet be a sad sweet feeling in your heart, of a purer, and holier sort than you have known before.”<sup>389</sup> A friend of Fanny reported that the “beautifully written” letter “had a very good effect in soothing her troubled mind.”<sup>390</sup>

#### STRETCHING THE CONSTITUTION: THE ADMISSION OF WEST VIRGINIA

Lincoln worried about the constitutionality not only of the Emancipation Proclamation but also of a bill authorizing the creation of West Virginia. The northwesternmost counties of the Old Dominion had long been estranged from the eastern part of the state. Virginians living beyond the Allegheny Mountains owned few slaves and chafed at their high taxes as well as their under-representation in the state legislature. They felt greater kinship with their neighbors in Ohio and Pennsylvania than with the residents of the tidewater region of their own state. In November 1861, delegates

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<sup>389</sup> David Davis to Swett, Washington, 16 December 1862, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield; Lincoln to Fanny McCullough, Washington, 23 December 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:16.

<sup>390</sup> W. W. Orme to David Davis, Bloomington, 2 January 1863, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

from thirty-four counties banded together at Wheeling and voted to secede from Confederate Virginia and establish a new state, to be called Kanawha. Six months later, a Unionist legislature, in which only the northwestern portion of the state was represented, approved the creation of Kanawha and applied for admission to the Union. Congress approved and sent the bill to Lincoln.<sup>391</sup>

The constitutionality of this procedure was questionable.<sup>392</sup> According to article IV of the Constitution, new states can be carved from existing ones only with “the consent of the Legislatures of the States concerned, as well as of the Congress.” The legislature of “the restored state of Virginia,” which had representatives from counties containing roughly one-third of the state’s population, did not appear sufficiently legitimate to authorize the division of the Old Dominion. Nevertheless, Congress voted on December 10 to admit West Virginia (i.e., Kanawha).

Two days later, Lincoln told the cabinet that he thought “the creation of this new State at this time of doubtful expediency.”<sup>393</sup> Orville Browning reported that the president was “distressed” about the law.<sup>394</sup> In mid-December, proponents of West Virginia statehood harbored “great fears that the President will veto” the bill granting it.<sup>395</sup> Lincoln, however, stated “that he was not so much opposed to it as some members of his

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<sup>391</sup> Richard O. Curry, A House Divided: A Study of Statehood Politics and the Copperhead Movement in West Virginia (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1964), 1-123; Charles Henry Ambler, A History of West Virginia (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1933), 311-34.

<sup>392</sup> J. G. Randall, Constitutional Problems Under Lincoln (rev. ed.; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1951), 434-76.

<sup>393</sup> Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:191 (entry for 12 December 1862)

<sup>394</sup> Pease and Randall, eds., Browning Diary, 1:596 (entry for 15 December 1862).

<sup>395</sup> Waitman T. Willey to Francis H. Pierpont, 17 December 1862, Pierpont Papers, in Randall, Constitutional Problems, 460n.

Cabinet.”<sup>396</sup> Lincoln was probably referring to Attorney General Bates, who insisted that the cabinet be asked to submit written opinions on the expediency and the constitutionality of the bill. The president complied. On December 27, the leading champions of statehood from Virginia reported that the “president has strongly assured us of his desire to sign the bill if he can[;] we are hopeful but not sanguine.”<sup>397</sup> Two days later they said that had “additional reason to believe that the president will sign our bill.”<sup>398</sup>

Meanwhile, cabinet members wrote out their opinions. Seward, Chase, and Stanton favored the measure, while Bates, Blair, and Welles were opposed.<sup>399</sup> (Caleb B. Smith had resigned in order to accept a federal judgeship and did not participate in this discussion; his successor, John Palmer Usher, took office later.) Friends of the statehood bill argued that Lincoln would be inconsistent if he vetoed it, for he had recognized the Wheeling government as the true government of Virginia and treated Francis H. Pierpont as its legitimate governor.

Lincoln’s written opinion did not reflect his earlier reservations about the expediency of admitting West Virginia. He was moved by the plight of the Unionists, whose leader, Pierpont, pleaded earnestly for statehood. “A thick gloom hangs over my mind about the new State,” Pierpont wrote in a letter which Lincoln saw. “I dont know how the Union sentiment of W. Va can be satisfied– Butternutism will sweep W. Va– In

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<sup>396</sup> Washington correspondence, 18 December, New York Evening Post, 18 December 1862.

<sup>397</sup> Willey and Jacob B. Blair to Pierpont, telegram, Washington, 27 December 1862, Pierpont Papers, West Virginia University.

<sup>398</sup> Jacob B. Blair to Pierpont, telegram, Washington, 29 December 1862, Pierpont Papers, West Virginia University.

<sup>399</sup> Bates memo, Bates Papers, Library of Congress; Niven, ed., Chase Papers, 3:347-49. In the summer of 1861, Bates had expressed his objections in a letter to A. F. Ritchie, dated Washington, 12 August 1861; Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser, 29 December 1862.

fact I fear the soldiers in the field will throw down their arms it will be terrible – terrible indeed.”<sup>400</sup> Pierpont telegraphed the president directly, saying: “I am in great hope that you will sign the bill to make West Virginia a new State. The loyal troops from Virginia have their hearts set on it; the loyal people in the bounds of the new State have their hearts set on it; and if the bill fails, God only knows the result. I fear general demoralization and I must be held responsible.”<sup>401</sup>

“We can scarcely dispense with the aid of West-Virginia in this struggle,” Lincoln asserted in his written opinion; “much less can we afford to have her against us, in Congress and in the field.” The “brave and good men” of West Virginia, who “have been true to the union under very severe trials,” consider “her admission into the union as a matter of life and death.” It would be shameful to turn them down, for “We have so acted as to justify their hopes; and we can not fully retain their confidence, and co-operation, if we seem to break faith with them.” Admitting West Virginia would advance the antislavery cause, for Congress had insisted that the new state’s constitution provide for gradual emancipation. Therefore the bill “turns that much slave soil to free; and thus, is a certain, and irrevocable encroachment upon the cause of the rebellion.”

The division of Virginia should not be “dreaded as a precedent,” Lincoln argued, for “a measure made expedient by a war, is no precedent for times of peace. It is said that the admission of West-Virginia, is secession, and tolerated only because it is our secession. Well, if we call it by that name, there is still difference enough between secession against the constitution, and secession in favor of the constitution.” Though he

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<sup>400</sup> Pierpont to Jacob B. Blair, Wheeling, 20 December 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>401</sup> From Pierpont’s reminiscences, Fairmont, West Virginia, correspondence, 17 March [1876], Wheeling Intelligencer, clipping pasted into Pierpont’s scrapbook number 2, Pierpont Papers, West Virginia University.

freely acknowledged that a majority of the state's voters had not participated in the election of the legislature, he pointed out that "it is a universal practice in the popular elections in all these States to give no legal consideration whatever to those who do not choose to vote, as against the effect of the votes of those, who do choose to vote."

Therefore, he argued, "it is not the qualified voters, but the qualified voters, who choose to vote, that constitute the political power of the state." Moreover, it should be borne in mind that many non-voters "were not merely neglectful of their rights under, and duty to, the government, but were also engaged in open rebellion against it." To be sure, there may have been some pro-Union men among the non-voters whose voices were smothered by their Confederate neighbors, "but we know too little of their number to assign them any appreciable value." Common sense dictated that the disloyal should not enjoy the same status as the loyal: "Can this government stand, if it indulges constitutional constructions by which men in open rebellion against it, are to be accounted, man for man, the equals of those who maintain their loyalty to it?" Should the rebels "be accounted even better citizens, and more worthy of consideration, than those who merely neglect to vote? If so, their treason against the constitution, enhance their constitutional value! Without braving these absurd conclusions, we can not deny that the body which consents to the admission of West-Virginia, is the Legislature of Virginia." Citing the aphorism that "the devil takes care of his own," Lincoln asserted that "much more should a good spirit – the spirit of the constitution and the Union – take care of its own – I think it can not do less, and live."<sup>402</sup>

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<sup>402</sup> Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:26-28.

On New Years Eve, leading champions of statehood from western Virginia (including Senator Waitman T. Willey and Congressmen Jacob B. Blair and William G. Brown) called on Lincoln by invitation. They rehearsed the various arguments in favor of statehood. He then read aloud the opinions of the cabinet and part of his own opinion. They liked what he had written, which seemed to favor statehood. But he stopped before reaching his conclusion. Using imagery from card playing, he teased them about their evident optimism. “I suppose you think this is the odd trick,” meaning that his positive opinion would result in a cabinet vote of four to three in favor of statehood. But they were disappointed that he would not definitely assure them he would sign the bill. He urged them to come next morning to learn his decision. Blair recalled that on New Year’s Day, before 10 a.m., “I presented myself at the White House, but found the doors locked. I raised the sash of one of the large windows, gained an entrance, and went directly to the President’s room. When I was ushered in I found Secretaries Seward and Stanton with him, but the President went directly to his desk and, taking out the West Virginia bill, held it up so that I could read the signature, Approved: Abraham Lincoln.” The president manifested “the simplicity and joyousness of a child, when it feels it has done its duty, and gratified a friend.” The bill admitted West Virginia, with the proviso that the voters of the new state would have to approve a clause in its constitution providing for compensated emancipation. They did so promptly, and the state was officially admitted to the Union in June 1863.<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>403</sup> Blair’s account given in the Washington correspondence by Lan, 26 January [1876], Pittsburgh Dispatch, n.d., clipping in scrapbook number one, Francis H. Pierpont Papers, West Virginia University; Blair’s account given to Granville Parker, paraphrased in Granville Parker, The Formation of the State of West Virginia (Wellsburg: Glass & Son, 1875), 185-186; Waitman T. Willey, “The Final Crisis in Our Struggle for Statehood,” West Virginia Historical Magazine 1 (1901): 20-24.

Later the president told Pierpont that his telegram “was the turning point in my mind in signing the bill. I said to myself, [‘]here, this is not a constitutional question, it is a political question. The government has been fighting nearly two years for its existence. The friends of the bill say it will strengthen the Union cause and will weaken the cause of the Rebels. It is a step and is political. I will not trouble myself further about the constitutional point,[’] so I determined to sign the bill.”

#### MODIFYING THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION

Lincoln had other things on his mind that busy New Year’s Eve, notably the Emancipation Proclamation, due to be issued the following day. On December 29 and 31, the cabinet discussed a draft of the final version of that momentous document. The president had modified the preliminary version somewhat, toning down its pledge that the government “will recognize and maintain 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 inserted the word suitable before any efforts they may make for their actual freedom. He had doubts about the word maintain. As he later told Pennsylvania Governor Andrew G. Curtin, “It was Seward’s persistence which resulted in the insertion of the word ‘maintain,’ which I feared under the circumstances was promising more than it was quite probable we could carry out.”<sup>404</sup>

Chase argued that no areas in Louisiana and Virginia should be exempted save West Virginia, a suggestion which was not taken because the president understandably feared that slaveholders in areas under Union control might successfully argue in court

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<sup>404</sup> Francis B. Carpenter, The Inner Life of Abraham Lincoln: Six Months at the White House (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1867), 83-84.



that the government had no right to seize their slaves. Lincoln also hoped to placate Northern conservatives, Border State residents, and Southern Unionists.<sup>405</sup> The treasury secretary further recommended a closing sentence with echoes of the Declaration of Independence: “And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice warranted by the Constitution, and of duty demanded by the circumstances of the country, I invoke the considerate judgement of Mankind and the gracious favor of Almighty God.” Lincoln adopted this, substituting upon military necessity for of duty demanded by the circumstances of the country.

Blair thought the freedmen should be enjoined “to show themselves worthy of freedom by fidelity & diligence in the employments which may be given to them by the observance of order & by abstaining from all violence not required by duty or for self-defence. And whilst I appeal & it is due to them to say that the conduct of large numbers of these people since the war began justifies confidence in their fidelity & humanity generally.”<sup>406</sup> In keeping with this advice, Lincoln altered his version to read: “I hereby enjoin upon the people so declared to be free to abstain from all violence, unless in necessary self-defence; and I recommend to them that, in all cases when allowed, they labor faithfully for reasonable wages.”

Curiously, Lincoln dropped the word forever from his earlier drafts, which stated that the slaves of disloyal masters “shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free.” The final draft merely read that those slaves “are, and henceforward shall be free.” He may have feared that courts would take a dim view of such language. Unlike the preliminary

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<sup>405</sup> William C. Harris, With Charity for All: Lincoln and the Restoration of the Union (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 77.

<sup>406</sup> Montgomery Blair, Memorandum on Draft of Final Emancipation Proclamation, 31 December 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

version announced in September, the final Emancipation Proclamation said nothing about colonization.

That change pleased Radicals, but the Proclamation's legalistic language did not. "It must have required considerable ingenuity to give two and a half millions of human beings the priceless boon of Liberty in such a cold ungraceful way," remarked the Boston Commonwealth. "The heart of the Country was anticipating something warm and earnest. One could scarcely imagine that the herald of so blessed a dawn should have caught none of its glow. Was it not a time when some word of welcome, of sympathy, of hospitality for these long-enslaved men and women, might have been naturally uttered?"<sup>407</sup> James Freeman Clarke, an ultra-radical Unitarian minister, told his parishioners that the document should have been "put on principles of justice and right, not on mere war necessity."<sup>408</sup>

#### SABLE WARRIORS: ENLISTING BLACK TROOPS

A striking feature of the document was a provision that blacks might serve in the military: "And I further declare and make known, that such persons of suitable condition, will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service." This represented a reversal of Lincoln's earlier stand on the enlistment of blacks. On July 1, he had told Orville H. Browning that no blacks "are to be armed. It would produce a

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<sup>407</sup> Boston Commonwealth, 10 January 1863.

<sup>408</sup> Sermon of 26 September 1862, in Edward Everett Hale, ed., James Freeman Clarke: Autobiography, Diary and Correspondence (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1891), 243.

dangerous & fatal dissatisfaction in our army, and do more injury than good.”<sup>409</sup> Later that month during a cabinet meeting, he “expressed himself as averse to arming negroes” and said nothing about that subject in the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. Halleck too was unenthusiastic about the use of black troops: “I do not think much of the negro,” he told the cabinet.<sup>410</sup> Many others shared General Samuel R. Curtis’s belief that if blacks were enrolled in the service, “some of them might adopt Savage cruelty, repugnant to honorable modern warfare. It might also reduce the esprit du Corps of free man.”<sup>411</sup>

Politically Lincoln had to contend with fierce popular resistance to recruiting blacks, especially in the Midwest and Border States.<sup>412</sup> His Illinois friend, Colonel W. W. Orme, declared: “I don’t want to mingle in an army of Negroes. And if it has come at last to the point that the white race of the North cannot successfully contend in arms with the white race of the South, then let us quit the contest and stop the war. . . . I am getting some little disgusted with the extreme to which the anti-slavery element of this country is going.”<sup>413</sup> Presciently one Democratic Congressman from Ohio warned colleagues that the “question is one of political and social equality with the negro everywhere. If you make him the instrument by which your battles are fought, the means by which your victories are won, you must treat him as a victor is entitled to be treated, with all decent

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<sup>409</sup> Pease and Randall, eds., Browning Diary, 1:555 (entry for 1 July 1862). This was part of a hastily drafted paper Lincoln said he would read to the cabinet.

<sup>410</sup> Niven, ed., Chase Papers, 1:360 (diary entry for 2 August 1862)

<sup>411</sup> Samuel R. Curtis to Lyman Trumbull, St. Louis, 19 December 1861, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>412</sup> Voegeli, Free but Not Equal, 98-102.

<sup>413</sup> W. W. Orme to David Davis, Bloomington, 7 February 1863, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

and becoming respect.”<sup>414</sup> In 1862, the Republican governor of the Buckeye State rhetorically asked John Mercer Langston, a black man who wished to raise a regiment: “Do you not know, Mr. Langston, that this is a white man’s government; that white men are able to defend and protect it, and that to enlist a negro soldier would be to drive every white man out of the service? When we want you colored men we will notify you.”<sup>415</sup>

The way for the administration’s new departure had been paved by Congress, which in July approved Senator Henry Wilson’s amendment to the Militia Act authorizing the president “to receive into the service of the United States, for the purpose of constructing intrenchments, or performing camp service, or any other labor, or any military or naval service for which they may be found competent, persons of Africa descent, and such persons shall be enrolled and organized under such regulations, not inconsistent with the Constitution and laws, as the President may prescribe.”<sup>416</sup> The Second Confiscation Act contained a similar provision.

The changing mood among the electorate affected the thinking of both Congress and the president about the enlistment of blacks. Many Northerners shared the view of an Ohioan who maintained that “we have the same right to employ Black men on our side as they [the Confederates] have to use them against us.”<sup>417</sup> In May, another Buckeye informed Chase that the “very timid course of the President as to slavery, and the strange conduct of certain generals, are fast bringing public opinion to the fearful alternative of

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<sup>414</sup> Representative Chilton A. White in Voegeli, Free but Not Equal, 99.

<sup>415</sup> John Mercer Langston, From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol; or, The First and Only Negro Representative in Congress from the Old Dominion (Hartford, Conn.: American Publishing, 1894), 206.

<sup>416</sup> U. S. Statutes at Large, 12:599.

<sup>417</sup> Justin Hamilton to John Sherman, Mendon, Ohio, 24 May 1862, John Sherman Papers, Library of Congress.

an armed intervention of the slaves themselves. Those of you who have been in Washington for the last year can have no idea of the rapid change which is taking place in public opinion. I have heard the most ultra democrats of former times advocate the confiscation of all rebel property and the arming of the slaves.”<sup>418</sup>

Though authorized to enlist blacks as combat troops, Lincoln decided to employ them only in support roles.<sup>419</sup> He feared alienating the Border States and was aware that many in the army opposed using blacks as fighters. An Iowa colonel spoke for many officers when he wrote: “I have now sixty men on extra duty as teamsters &c. whose places could just as well be filled with niggers. We do not need a single negro in the army to fight but we could use to good advantage about one hundred & fifty with a regiment as teamsters & for making roads, chopping wood, policing camp &c.”<sup>420</sup>

On August 4, Lincoln refused the offer of two black regiments recruited in the West, explaining to Senators James F. Harlan and Samuel C. Pomeroy that “he had made up his mind not to accept at present the service of armed negroes. He would use them as teamsters, cooks, laborers on entrenchments and in every capacity save fighting. He declared that to accept regiments of armed negroes would be to lose forty thousand white soldiers now in the army, and would drive some of the border States out of the Union.” The employment of black troops in combat was premature; he said “he should wait till such a course seemed to a direct command of Providence before adopting it.”<sup>421</sup> He concluded his remarks saying, “Gentlemen, you have my decision. I have made my mind

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<sup>418</sup> Simeon Nash to Chase, Gallipolis, Ohio, 2 May 1862, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>419</sup> Washington correspondence by Van [D. W. Bartlett], 5 August, Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 9 August 1862.

<sup>420</sup> Samuel J. Kirkwood to [Halleck], Des Moines, 5 August 1862, letterpress copy, Kirkwood Papers, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City.

<sup>421</sup> Washington correspondence, 15 September, New York Tribune, 17 September 1862.

up deliberately and mean to adhere to it. It embodies my best judgment, and if the people are dissatisfied, I will resign and let Mr. Hamlin try it.” Pomeroy, laboring under the impression that the president was backing away from his earlier support of enlisting blacks, snapped: “I hope in God’s name, Mr. President, you will.”<sup>422</sup>

Summing up the mood of Radicals, Thaddeus Stevens disgustingly noted: “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.”<sup>423</sup>

Around that same time, the president told his close friend Leonard Swett that he had “no confidence” in blacks as fighters and predicted “that as much harm would come to us from the fact that we were arming negroes, as from a general proclamation of

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<sup>422</sup> Washington correspondence, 5 August, Chicago Tribune, 6 August 1862; Washington correspondence, 4 August, 15 September, New York Tribune, 5 August, 17 September 1862; Washington correspondence, 4 August, New York Herald and Cincinnati Gazette, 5 August 1862; Chicago Morning Post, 7 August 1862, copy, Allan Nevins Papers, Columbia University. This account is based on the testimony of the senator who uttered the sharp retort. Washington correspondence, 13 August, Cincinnati Gazette, 14 August 1862. Senator Harlan denied the account of the remark about Hamlin. Letter to the editor, 11 August, Washington National Republican, n.d., copied in the Washington correspondence, 13 August, Chicago Tribune, 14 August 1862; Washington correspondence, 11 August, New York Evening Post, 12 August 1862. John Hay emphatically denied that any such insult had been uttered. Washington correspondence, 22 September, Missouri Republican (St. Louis), 26 September 1862, in

Michael Burlingame, ed., Lincoln’s Journalist: John Hay’s Anonymous Writings for the Press, 1860-1864 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 308. Another less flamboyant account indicated that Lincoln said: “I knew this result must come, but I desire the State Governments and not the National executive to inaugurate the policy. Governor Sprague, above all others the best calculated from his former patriotism and his conservative constituency, has inaugurated the policy, and the President to-day is glad as if a weight of responsibility was lifted from his overburdened shoulders.” Washington correspondence, 9 August, New York Tribune, 11 August 1862. According to this report, Judge Wright of Iowa was present and offered to lead the regiments.

<sup>423</sup> Stevens to Simon Stevens, Lancaster, 10 August 1862, Palmer, ed., Letters of Stevens, 1:318.

freedom.”<sup>424</sup> On another occasion, Lincoln asked a congressman who was lobbying to have blacks enrolled in the military: “if I lose as many white men from the army of Virginia as I can enlist black men, will it pay?”<sup>425</sup> (There was in fact abundant reason to believe that white Kentuckians would quit the army if blacks were admitted to its ranks.)<sup>426</sup> In mid-August, Orville H. Browning told him that many Illinoisans were speculating that if the president “will accept one black Regiment he will lose twenty white Regiments by it.” Browning believed that the “time may come for arming the negroes. It is not yet.”<sup>427</sup>

Lincoln thought that time was late August. An informal effort by General David Hunter to raise troops in the Sea Islands of South Carolina foundered because of that general’s ineptitude. On August 10, Hunter reported that he was disbanding his black regiment. Surprisingly, two weeks later the War Department authorized the enrollment of 5,000 blacks in the Sea Islands under Hunter’s replacement, General Rufus Saxton. Without official sanction, a modest number of black troops in Louisiana and Kansas were also mustered in. Some blacks had begun serving aboard Union warships as early as the fall of 1861.<sup>428</sup>

It was not clear that slaves thus employed would become free. Lincoln deliberately avoided an explicit policy statement for fear of antagonizing Border State

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<sup>424</sup> Swett to his wife Laura, New York, 10 August 1862, David Davis Family Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>425</sup> Washington correspondence by Jane Grey Swisshelm, 10 February, St. Cloud Democrat, 26 February 1863, in Arthur J. Larsen, ed., Crusader and Feminist: Letters of Jane Grey Swisshelm, 1858-1865 (Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1934), 172.

<sup>426</sup> Washington correspondence, 21 August, New York Times, 22 August 1862; Jeremiah T. Boyle to James B. Fry, Camp Nelson, Kentucky, 25 June 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>427</sup> Browning to Lincoln, Quincy, Illinois, 11 August 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>428</sup> Dudley Taylor Cornish, The sable arm: Negro troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865 (New York: Longmans, Green, 1956), 56-93.

sentiment. A journalist remarked apropos of Lincoln’s calculated ambiguity, “Never was man more cat-like in stealthily feeling his way before him.” The president evidently encouraged James H. Lane to enlist blacks in Kansas and thereby induce slaves from Missouri to desert their plantations and farms, slip across the border, and join up. Missouri slave owners might then see merit in Lincoln’s compensated emancipation scheme and press their legislators to adopt it.<sup>429</sup> (In May, when David Hunter issued a proclamation justifying the enlistment of blacks, Lincoln said that he wanted the general “to do it, not say it.”)<sup>430</sup> In July, when Lane told the president and Stanton that he intended to raise two black regiments in Kansas, he was not forbidden to do so.<sup>431</sup>

Six months earlier, Lane had planned to lead a column against Texas. According to one report, his instructions were, in effect, to “let slavery be disposed of by military necessities and the course of events. If slaves come within our lines from the plantations beyond the federal lines, use them. If they can work on fortifications use their services, clothe, feed and pay them. If absolutely necessary, arm them. If [they are] slaves of rebels, free them.” Lane’s “Southern Expedition” was eventually scrubbed after he and David Hunter quarreled about who should command it.<sup>432</sup> When word of Lane’s instructions leaked out, an incredulous Democrat asked: “Can it be possible that a chief magistrate of a great nation has no settled policy? Can it be possible that he lets out his administration by contract to politicians who are to take turns in the management of

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<sup>429</sup> Washington correspondence by Agate [Whitelaw Reid], 25 July, Cincinnati Gazette, 29 July 1862. The Washington correspondent of the Chicago Times emphatically denied this story. Chicago Times, 23 July 1862.

<sup>430</sup> Lincoln told this to Carl Schurz. George W. Smalley to Sydney Howard Gay, Strasburg [Virginia], 21 June 1862, Gay Papers, Columbia University.

<sup>431</sup> Washington correspondence, 30 July, New York Tribune, 31 July 1862.

<sup>432</sup> Washington correspondence, 28 January, New York World, 29 January 1862; Washington correspondence, 6 February, Philadelphia Inquirer, 7 February 1862.



it?”<sup>433</sup> (Curiously, in September Lincoln refused to accept into the service a black regiment from Rhode Island.)<sup>434</sup>

After the Fredericksburg debacle, Maine governor Israel Washburn recommended that the president “now quietly commence organizing colored regiments – they will fight & will save him if he will let them.” Why, Washburn asked, “are our leaders unwilling that Sambo should save white boys?”<sup>435</sup> Also indignant was Iowa Governor Samuel J. Kirkwood, who remarked to Halleck: “When this war is over & we have summed up the entire loss of life it has imposed on the country I shall not have any regrets if it is found that a part of the dead are niggers and that all are not white men.”<sup>436</sup> The governor could not “understand or appreciate the policy that insists that all the lives lost . . . shall be those of white men when black men are found willing to do the work and take the risks.”<sup>437</sup>

In fact, Lincoln was no longer unwilling to enlist blacks, as the Emancipation Proclamation made clear. At first, he wanted them to serve in capacities and areas where they were unlikely to be captured. Shortly after issuing the Proclamation, he suggested to General John A. Dix that Fort Monroe be manned by blacks: “The proclamation has been issued. We were not succeeding -- at best, were progressing too slowly -- without it.

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<sup>433</sup> Robert Harryman to S. S. Cox, Newark, Ohio, 26 January 1862, Cox Papers, Brown University.

<sup>434</sup> William Sprague to Edwin M. Stanton, Providence, 9 September 1862; Thomas A. Jenckes to Lincoln, Providence, 11 September 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Lincoln to Sprague, Washington, 20 September, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:431. In early August, the War Department had authorized Governor Sprague to raise a regiment of blacks. Providence Journal, 5, 6 August 1862.

<sup>435</sup> Israel Washburn to Hannibal Hamlin, Augusta, 17, 20 December 1862, Israel Washburn Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>436</sup> Kirkwood to [Halleck], Des Moines, 5 August 1862, letterpress copy, Kirkwood Papers, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City.

<sup>437</sup> Kirkwood to Mrs. Harriet N. Kellogg, [Des Moines], 28 March [1863], letterpress copy, Kirkwood Papers, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City.

Now, that we have it, and bear all the disadvantage of it, (as we do bear some in certain quarters) we must also take some benefit from it, if practicable. I therefore will thank you for your well considered opinion whether Fortress-Monroe, and York-Town, one or both, could not, in whole or in part, be garrisoned by colored troops, leaving the white forces now necessary at those places, to be employed elsewhere.”<sup>438</sup>

Two months later, Lincoln encouraged Andrew Johnson, then serving as military governor of Tennessee, to recruit blacks into the army. “The colored population is the great available and yet unavailed of, force for restoring the Union. The bare sight of fifty thousand armed, and drilled black soldiers on the banks of the Mississippi, would end the rebellion at once. And who doubts that we can present that sight, if we but take hold in earnest?”<sup>439</sup> In July 1862, while discussing the Mississippi River and the many blacks living along it, Lincoln had told Orville H. Browning: “I am determined to open it, and, if necessary will take all these negroes to open it and keep it open.”<sup>440</sup> He prodded General N. P. Banks to expedite the recruitment of Louisiana blacks: “To now avail ourselves of this element of force is very important, if not indispensable. . . . I shall be very glad if you will take hold of the matter in earnest.”<sup>441</sup> In the summer of 1863, Lincoln told U. S. Grant that black troops constituted “a resource which, if vigorously applied now, will soon close the contest. It works doubly, weakening the enemy and strengthening us.”<sup>442</sup>

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<sup>438</sup> Lincoln to John A. Dix, Washington, 14 January 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:56.

<sup>439</sup> Lincoln to Andrew Johnson, Washington, 26 March 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:149-50.

<sup>440</sup> Pease and Randall, eds., Browning Diary, 1:562 (entry for 24 July 1862).

<sup>441</sup> Lincoln to Banks, Washington, 29 March 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:154.

<sup>442</sup> Lincoln to Grant, Washington, 9 August 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:374.

Recruiting went too slowly for Lincoln's taste. In May 1863, he complained to a delegation urging the appointment of Frémont to command an army of 10,000 black men that "the policy of the government, so far as he controlled it, was fixed, it was that [the] government should avail itself of any means to obtain the aid of emancipated slaves" but acknowledged that he "was only under embarrassment how to carry the policy out." He "confessed to a partial failure in the endeavors which had been made to recruit colored soldiers both North and South" and inquired of the delegation how he should proceed: "You ask a suitable command for General Fremont. Now he is the second [ranking] officer of the army . . . . He would expect a department. I cannot dismiss him from that position to offer him an inferior position. You place me in the position of the English Lord who, when told by his paternal relative to take a wife, replied, 'whose wife shall I take, father?'" He wanted black troops to occupy the region around Vicksburg and said he "had explained the matter to various officers of high rank, but have always found on these occasions I ran afoul of somebody's dignity. I would like anybody who can to undertake the matter. I believe Gen. Fremont peculiarly adapted to this special work. I would like to have him do it." He pledged that if the committee could raise 10,000 troops (they had claimed they could recruit 60,000 within two months) he would put Frémont in charge of them.<sup>443</sup> The journalist D. W. Bartlett paraphrased what Lincoln had been saying to various men throughout the spring: "I have made up my mind to give the black man every possible encouragement to fight for us. I will do him justice, and I will dismiss any officer who will not carry out my policy. If the people dislike this policy they will

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<sup>443</sup> Conversation with a committee from the Puritan Church of New York, headed by the Rev. Dr. George B. Cheever, 30 May 1863, New York World, 12 June 1863; Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:239.

say so at the next presidential election – but so long as I am president the government shall deal fairly with this unfortunate race.”<sup>444</sup>

Eventually, Johnson, Banks, Grant, Massachusetts Governor John A. Andrew, and Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas did “take hold,” and by war’s end over 170,000 blacks soldiers and approximately 20,000 black sailors served in the war, constituting about 9% of the total Union armed forces. Lincoln endorsed the use of black troops partly because public resistance was waning rapidly after McClellan’s defeat on the Peninsula. In addition, he may have been moved by the history of black soldiers in the War of 1812 and the American Revolutionary War. In the former, 500 of them played a key role in Andrew Jackson’s victory at the Battle of New Orleans; in the latter, approximately 5,000 took up arms to help the colonists gain independence. In February, Frederick Douglass asked an audience at Cooper Institute: “The negro fought the British under Jackson. Why not fight the rebels under Hooker?”<sup>445</sup> Lincoln agreed that they should.

#### FREE AT LAST: EMANCIPATION OFFICIALLY DECLARED

As New Years Day approached, supporters and opponents of emancipation lobbied the president. Among them was the Rev. Dr. Byron Sunderland, who said: “We are full of faith and prayer that you will make clean sweep for the Right.” With an expression half-sad and half-shrewd, Lincoln replied: “Doctor, it’s very hard sometimes to know what is right! You pray often and honestly, but so do those across the lines. They pray and all their preachers pray honestly. You and I don’t think them justified in praying for their objects, but they pray earnestly, no doubt! If you and I had our own way, Doctor,

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<sup>444</sup> Washington correspondence by Van [D. W. Bartlett], 22 April, Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican , 24 April 1863.

<sup>445</sup> New York Evening Post, 7 February 1863.

we will settle this war without bloodshed, but Providence permits blood to be shed. It's hard to tell what Providence wants of us. Sometimes, we, ourselves, are more humane than the Divine Mercy seems to us to be.”<sup>446</sup>

The previous year, Lincoln had impressed Orville H. Browning with a similar observation. One Sunday afternoon in the White House library, as Lincoln was reading the Bible and Browning perused some other volume, the Illinois senator predicted that the North would not win unless it attacked slavery: “This is the great curse of our land, and we must make an effort to remove it before we can hope to receive the help of the Almighty.”

“Browning,” the president replied, “suppose God is against us in our view on the subject of slavery in this country, and our method of dealing with it?”

Browning was “very much struck by this answer,” which seemed to indicate that the president “was thinking deeply of what a higher power than man sought to bring about by the great events then transpiring.” Browning recalled that this answer “caused me to reflect that perhaps he had thought more deeply upon this subject than I had.”<sup>447</sup> (In 1865, Lincoln would return to this theme in his second inaugural address.)

On New Year's eve, Lincoln made a similar point to a trio of abolitionist clergy who called at the White House to present a memorial urging him to carry out God's will by extending the Proclamation to apply to the whole country. He replied that while he opposed slavery wholeheartedly, he admitted that he harbored doubts about the Almighty's stance: “I am not so certain that God's views and feelings in respect to it are

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<sup>446</sup> Allen C. Clark, Abraham Lincoln in the National Capital (Washington: W.F. Roberts, 1925), 41.

<sup>447</sup> Browning interviewed by Nicolay, Springfield, 17 June 1875, in Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 5.

the same as mine. If his feelings were like mine, how could he have permitted it to remain so long? I am obliged to believe that God may not, after all, look upon it in the same light as I do.” He added that just because a proclamation said slaves were free did not in fact make them free. “In one of our western courts,” he remarked, “there had been an attempt made to show that a calf had five legs – the way the point was to be established was by calling the tail a leg, but the decision of the judge was that calling the tail a leg did not make it a leg, and the calf had but four legs after all.”<sup>448</sup> As he ushered the ministers out, he good-naturedly teased them, saying: “this is the first time I ever had the honor of receiving a delegation from the Almighty.” One of the visitors, William Goodell, expressed admiration for the president’s “frankness and earnestness” and his willingness “to allow and to appreciate frankness and earnestness in others.”<sup>449</sup>

On January 1, 1863, after a sleepless night, Lincoln made a fair copy of the revised Proclamation. As he was doing so, his wife, who (according to her eldest son) “was very much opposed to the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation,” interrupted him, “inquiring in her sharp way, ‘Well, what do you intend doing?’” He replied: “I am a man under orders, I cannot do otherwise.”<sup>450</sup>

When Lincoln viewed the engrossed copy that had been prepared by the State Department, he noticed a technical error in the wording of the closing subscription and ordered that it be corrected. While that revision was taking place, he had to preside over

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<sup>448</sup> N. Worth Brown and Randolph C. Downes, eds., “A Conference with Abraham Lincoln: From the Diary of Reverend Nathan Brown,” Northwest Ohio Quarterly 22 (1949-50): 49-63.

<sup>449</sup> Principia, 8 January 1863, in M. Leon Perkal, “William Goodell: A Life of Reform” (PhD dissertation, City University of New York, 1972), 377.

<sup>450</sup> Robert Todd Lincoln told this to Mrs. Florence Weston Stanley. Mrs. Florence Weston Stanley to Dwight C. Sturges, [Needham, Massachusetts?], 7 February 1935, Christian Science Monitor, 12 February 1935.

the traditional New Years reception at the White House. According to the journalist Noah Brooks, the “press was tremendous, and the jam most excessive; all persons high or low, civil, uncivil, or otherwise, were obliged to fall into an immense line of surging, crowding sovereigns [i.e., citizens], who were all forcing their way along the stately portico of the White House to the main entrance.”<sup>451</sup>

After three hours, Lincoln returned to his office, exhausted from shaking hundreds of hands. When he began to sign the corrected copy of the proclamation, his hand trembled. “I could not for a moment, control my arm,” he later recalled. “I paused and a superstitious feeling came over me which made me hesitate.” Had he made a mistake? he wondered.<sup>452</sup> But swiftly regaining his composure, he told William Henry Seward and his son Frederick: “I never, in my life, felt more certain that I was doing right, than I do in signing this paper.” He added: “I have been receiving calls, and shaking hands since nine o’clock this morning, till my arm is stiff and numb.” He feared that if his signature appeared shaky, some people would think “he had compunctions.” So, with renewed firmness, he said: “anyway, it is going to be done!” Slowly and carefully he wrote out his full name in a bold, clear hand. Smiling, he looked up and observed softly: “That will do.”<sup>453</sup>

The pen he used to sign the document Lincoln gave to Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner, a long-time champion of freedom, who passed it along to George R. Livermore, author of An Historical Research Respecting the Opinions of the Founders of

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<sup>451</sup> Washington correspondence, 3 January, Sacramento Daily Union, 29 January 1863, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 15.

<sup>452</sup> Isaac N. Arnold, The History of Abraham Lincoln and the Overthrow of Slavery (Chicago: Clarke, 1866), 304.

<sup>453</sup> Seward, Seward at Washington, 2:151; Frederick W. Seward, Reminiscences of a War-Time Statesman and Diplomat, 1830-1915 (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1916), 227.

the Republic on Negroes as Slaves, as Citizens and as Soldiers. In Early November, Sumner had forwarded a copy of that recently-published work to Lincoln.<sup>454</sup> It “interested President Lincoln much,” Sumner recalled. “The President expressed a desire to consult it while he was preparing the final Proclamation of emancipation; and as his own copy was mislaid, he requested me to lend him mine.”<sup>455</sup> On Christmas, the senator complied with the request.

The president had been nettled by Sumner’s brusque manner and impatient rhetoric, but, as Carl Schurz observed, though “it required all his fortitude to bear Sumner’s intractable insistence, Lincoln did not at all deprecate Sumner’s agitation for an immediate emancipation policy, even though it did reflect upon the course of the administration.” To the contrary, “he rather welcomed everything that would prepare the public mind for the approaching development.”<sup>456</sup> Sumner’s counterpart in the House, Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania, often denounced the president, but, as Alexander K. McClure noted, the two men in effect worked in tandem: “Stevens was ever clearing the underbrush and preparing the soil, while Lincoln followed to sow the seeds that were to ripen in a regenerated Union.”<sup>457</sup>

Often portrayed as antagonists, in fact Lincoln and the Radicals were united in their desire for emancipation and for a vigorous prosecution of the war. They differed only in temperament and in tactics.<sup>458</sup> Lincoln was no reluctant emancipator; he

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<sup>454</sup> Sumner to Lincoln, Washington, 8 November 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>455</sup> “The Emancipation Pen,” Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings 44:595-596.

<sup>456</sup> Schurz, Reminiscences, 2:317.

<sup>457</sup> Alexander K. McClure, Abraham Lincoln and Men of War-Times (Philadelphia: Times, 1892), 262.

<sup>458</sup> Trefousse, Radical Republicans, passim



welcomed the liberation of slaves as enthusiastically as any abolitionist.<sup>459</sup> In discussing the Emancipation Proclamation with Joshua Speed, he said: “I believe that in this measure my fondest hopes will be realized.”<sup>460</sup> Constitutional and political constraints had forced him to delay issuing the document; if he had acted solely on his own convictions and inclinations, emancipation would have come about much sooner. Lincoln was not forced by political considerations to issue the Proclamation; on the contrary, such considerations compelled him to postpone doing what he had long wanted to do.

Radicals rejoiced. “Now, hurrah for Old Abe and the proclamation,” exulted Ben Wade.<sup>461</sup> Thaddeus Stevens told his constituents that the proclamation “contained precisely the principles which I had advocated.”<sup>462</sup> William Lloyd Garrison saluted the Proclamation as “a great historic event, sublime in its magnitude, momentous and beneficent in its far-reaching consequences.”<sup>463</sup> Similarly, the budding intellectual historian Moses Coit Tyler thought the date of January 1, 1863 “the greatest one for America and perhaps for the human family since July 4, 1776.”<sup>464</sup> The Chicago Tribune, which regarded the war as God’s punishment for the sin of slavery, praised Lincoln for sparing the country nine of the ten plagues visited upon the Egyptians for keeping the Jews enslaved. (The one plague that had already been visited upon Americans was the

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<sup>459</sup> “The President and ‘The Pressure,’” Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican, 11 October 1862.

<sup>460</sup> Speed to Herndon, Louisville, 7 February 1866, Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants: Letters, Interviews, and Statements about Abraham Lincoln (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 197.

<sup>461</sup> Wade to George W. Julian, Ashtabula, 29 September 1862, Giddings-Julian Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>462</sup> Fawn M. Brodie, Thaddeus Stevens, Scourge of the South (New York: Norton, 1959), 159.

<sup>463</sup> The Liberator (Boston), 2 January 1863, in James M. McPherson, The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 121.

<sup>464</sup> Jessica T. Austen, ed., Moses Coit Tyler, 1835-1900: Selections from His Letters and Diaries (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page, 1911), 19.

slaying of many first-born.) The editors, however, warned that “if like the King of Egypt, the President falters and fails to let this people [i.e., the slaves] go, fearfulness and trembling may well fill the land. Judgments, awful even as those that fell upon Egypt, will be sure to overtake us.”<sup>465</sup>

The abolitionist Samuel May, Jr., gave Lincoln credit for raising the moral sensibility of the North “up to the level of his Proclamation,” although “a large minority are still below it.” He “declared that Lincoln, not the abolitionists, had brought about whatever antislavery sentiment existed in the North.”<sup>466</sup> Exclaimed Maria Weston Chapman: “Hurrah! Hosanna! Hallelujah! Laudamus! Nunc dimittis! Jubilate! Amen!”<sup>467</sup> Theodore Tilton proposed “Three cheers for God!” The Proclamation, though “not all one could wish,” was still “too much not to be thankful for. It makes the remainder of slavery too valueless and precarious to be worthy keeping.” Optimistically Tilton predicted that the “millennium is on the way” and declared that Lincoln’s action, “faulty as it is, & long delayed, redeems the failing fortunes of his Administration.” Disappointed that not all slave states were covered by the Proclamation, Tilton anticipated that “Providence means to supplement it de facto, by adding the omitted states in due time.”<sup>468</sup>

Blacks were especially jubilant. At mass rallies in New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and elsewhere in the North, speakers hailed the Proclamation, and cannon salvos

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<sup>465</sup> Chicago Tribune, 1 January 1863

<sup>466</sup> Donald Yacovone, Samuel Joseph May and the Dilemmas of the Liberal Persuasion, 1797-1871 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 173-174.

<sup>467</sup> Maria Weston Chapman to Abby Hopper Gibbons, 5 January 1863, in Sarah Hopper Emerson, ed., Life of Abby Hopper Gibbons (2 vols.; New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1896-97), 1:384.

<sup>468</sup> Tilton to Susan B. Anthony, 11 January 1863, in Ida Husted Harper, The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony (3 vols.; Indianapolis: Bowen-Merrill, 1898-1908), 1:225-226; Tilton to Garrison, New York, 9 January 1863, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

honored the event. Henry Highland Garnet told a vast crowd of blacks that Lincoln was “the man of our choice and hope” and that the Proclamation was “one of the greatest acts in all of history,” an act that should be celebrated annually like the Fourth of July.<sup>469</sup> When the news reached the capital of Massachusetts, thousands of blacks exulted passionately.<sup>470</sup> “I never saw enthusiasm before,” Frederick Douglass reported. “I never saw joy before. Men, women, young and old, were up; hats and bonnets were in the air, and we gave three cheers for Abraham Lincoln.” Shouts of “Glory, Hallelujah!” “Old John Brown,” “Marching On,” and “Blow Ye the Trumpet, Blow” filled the air. Douglass deemed the issuance of the Proclamation “a mighty event for the bondman” and “a still mightier event for the nation at large, and mighty as it is for both, the slave and the nation, it is still mightier when viewed in its relation to the cause of truth and justice throughout the world.”<sup>471</sup> It was, Douglass told an audience at Cooper Union in March 1863, “the greatest event in our nation’s history.”<sup>472</sup> Another black abolitionist, H. Ford Douglas, wrote that “Abraham Lincoln has crossed the Rubicon and by one simple act of Justice to the slave links his memory with immortality.”<sup>473</sup> In Philadelphia, a white abolitionist reported to Lincoln that the “Black people all trust you. They believe that you desire to do them Justice.”<sup>474</sup> When Sojourner Truth, the black woman renowned for

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<sup>469</sup> Weekly Anglo-African, 10 January 1863; Martin B. Pasternak, Rise Now and Fly to Arms: The Life of Henry Highland Garnet (New York: Garland, 1995), 107.

<sup>470</sup> Boston Evening Journal, 1 January 1863.

<sup>471</sup> Douglass, speech of 6 February 1863, in John W. Blassingame et al., eds., The Frederick Douglass Papers, Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews (5 vols.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979-1992), 3:568.

<sup>472</sup> William Lee Miller, President Lincoln: The Duty of a Statesman (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 261.

<sup>473</sup> H. Ford Douglas to Fredrick Douglass, Colliersville, Tennessee, 8 January 1863, C. Peter Ripley, ed., The Black Abolitionist Papers (5 vols.; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985-1992), 5:166.

<sup>474</sup> Benjamin Rush Plumly to Lincoln, Philadelphia, 1 January 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

helping many slaves escape from bondage, expressed gratitude to Lincoln for being the only president who ever did anything for her people, he modestly replied: “And the only one who ever had such opportunity. Had our friends in the South behaved themselves, I could have done nothing whatever.”<sup>475</sup> The poet Frances Ellen Watkins Harper penned verses honoring the Proclamation:

It shall flash through coming ages,  
It shall light the distant years;  
And eyes now dim with sorrow  
Shall be brighter through their tears.<sup>476</sup>

Some Radicals regretted that Lincoln exempted all of Tennessee as well as parts of Louisiana and Virginia. “He might have stricken the shackles at once from the limbs of several hundreds of thousands of slaves, and thereby given to those left in bondage to Rebels an earnest that our failure to reach and liberate them resulted from want of power rather than will,” observed the New York Tribune.<sup>477</sup> The president had received strong protests from the Volunteer State, whose people (so it was alleged) were loyal but had been prevented from holding elections by the warfare raging in their midst.<sup>478</sup>

A few abolitionists who had been disappointed by the Preliminary Proclamation underwent a change of heart as Emancipation Day drew near. Lydia Maria Child said apropos of Lincoln’s delay: “it would not be fair to blame the President for moving so

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<sup>475</sup> Lucy N. Colman, letter of 1 November, Rochester Express, 10 November 1864; Sojourner Truth to Oliver Johnson, 17 November 1864, National Anti-Slavery Standard (New York), 17 December 1864.

<sup>476</sup> Lydia Maria Child, Freedmen’s Book, 250.

<sup>477</sup> New York Tribune, 3 January 1863.

<sup>478</sup> Petition signed by Russell Houston et al., Nashville, 4 December 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Washington correspondence, 25 December, New York Herald, 26 December 1862; Washington correspondence, 28 December, New York Evening Post, 29 December 1862.

slowly. The people were not prepared to sustain him in any such measure; they had become too generally demoralized by long subservience to the Slave Power.”<sup>479</sup>

(Similarly, Theodore Parker in 1856 had acknowledged that office-holders must be more circumspect than reformers: “I think that the anti-Slavery men have not always done quite justice to the political men. See why. It is easy for Mr. Garrison and Mr. Phillips or me to say all of their thought. I am responsible to nobody, and nobody to me. But it is not easy for Mr. Sumner, Mr. Seward, and Mr. Chase to say all of their thoughts; because they have a position to maintain, and they must keep that position.”)<sup>480</sup>

Opinion in the Border States was, as Lincoln predicted, hostile. In Maryland, Henry Winter Davis exclaimed that the proclamation heralded “the end of republican liberty!” Contemptuously he called Lincoln a panicky “fool” who “does not know what he is doing.”<sup>481</sup> The Catholic archbishop of Baltimore indignantly exclaimed: “While our brethren are slaughtered in hecatombs, Abraham Lincoln coolly issues his Emancipation Proclamation, letting loose from three to four millions of half civilized Africans to murder their Masters and Mistresses! And all that under the pretense of philanthropy!! Puritan hypocrisy never exhibited itself in a more horrible and detestable attitude.”<sup>482</sup>

Many Democrats in the Free States also objected strenuously. The issuance of the Proclamation, said the Cincinnati Enquirer, was “as much a usurpation and revolution in the Government” as would be Lincoln’s assumption of “the Imperial crown” and his

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<sup>479</sup> Child to William Lloyd Garrison Haskins, Wayland, 28 December 1862, Child Letters, 1817-1880, ed. Meltzer and Holland, 423.

<sup>480</sup> Parker, speech of 7 May 1856, in Mason Lowance, ed., Against Slavery: An Abolitionist Reader (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 288.

<sup>481</sup> Henry Winter Davis to Sophie Du Pont, [Baltimore], 24 September 1862, transcript, S. F. Du Pont Papers, Hagley Museum, Wilmington, Delaware.

<sup>482</sup> Diary of Archbishop Martin J. Spalding, 1 January 1863, in Kenneth J. Zanca, “Baltimore’s Catholics and the Funeral of Lincoln,” Maryland Historical Magazine 98 (2003): 94.

declaration that he was “Dictator of America.” It was “a complete overthrow of the Constitution he swore to protect and defend.”<sup>483</sup> Other Democratic papers in the Midwest deemed it “a wicked, atrocious and revolting deed” and an “impudent and insulting to God as to man, for it declares those ‘equal’ whom God created unequal.”<sup>484</sup>

In New York, a leading Catholic journal protested that the Proclamation would transform the conflict: “It is no longer to be a war between white men; it is the St. Domingo massacres inaugurated on our soil, under the sanction, approval and encouragement of the Government.”<sup>485</sup> The Journal of Commerce noted that by freeing the slaves of loyal masters without compensation in Union-occupied Florida, Lincoln “has done a great injustice, for which there is no excuse.”<sup>486</sup>

Florida was not the only state where slaves would become free on January 1, whether their masters were loyal or not. The exemption of areas under federal control (where 800,000 slaves lived) caused some to scoff that the “Proclamation is a dead letter upon the face of it. It don’t free a negro where a negro is to be freed, but enslaves, or re-enslaves all, where the negro could be freed.”<sup>487</sup> But in fact the Proclamation freed tens of thousands of slaves in Union-occupied Florida, Arkansas, Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia on New Years Day. And hundreds of thousands more would be freed as federal armies penetrated ever deeper into the Confederacy.

On January 12, Jefferson Davis expressed his outrage in a message to the Confederate Congress in which he called the Emancipation Proclamation “a measure by

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<sup>483</sup> Cincinnati Enquirer, 4 January 1863.

<sup>484</sup> Chicago Times, 3 January 1863; Columbus Crisis, 14 January 1863.

<sup>485</sup> New York Metropolitan Record, n.d., copied in the New York Evening Express, 9 January 1863.

<sup>486</sup> New York Journal of Commerce, n.d., copied in the New York Evening Express, 3 January 1863.

<sup>487</sup> New York Evening Express, 9 January 1863.

which several millions of human beings of an inferior race, peaceful and contented laborers in their sphere, are doomed to extermination, while at the same time they are encouraged to a general assassination of their masters by the insidious recommendation ‘to abstain from violence unless in necessary self-defense.’ Our own detestation of those who have attempted the most execrable measure recorded in the history of guilty man is tempered by profound contempt for the impotent rage which it discloses.” Davis warned that white officers commanding black units would be turned over to Confederate state governments for punishment as instigators of slave uprisings, and that black troops would be restored to their masters.<sup>488</sup> The Richmond Enquirer deemed the Emancipation Proclamation “little more than the indecent expression of Lincoln’s rage and fiendishments” and predicted that it would “tell the world how bad he is.”<sup>489</sup> Caleb Cushing, former U.S. attorney general and chairman of the 1860 Democratic conventions in Baltimore and Charleston, bemoaned “the unspeakable calamities which the Republicans and their President have brought upon us.” Among those calamities Cushing listed “possible servile war, probable foreign war, the attempted total prostration of all constitutional rights and liberty throughout the Northern States, and the proposed massacre of eight millions of white men women and children in the Southern States in order to turn four millions of black men into vagabonds [and] robbers.”<sup>490</sup>

The most telling criticism of the Proclamation came from eminent lawyers who questioned the constitutionality of the Proclamation. Among them were Joel Parker, William Beach Lawrence, and Benjamin R. Curtis, all of whom questioned the

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<sup>488</sup> OR, II, 5:807-808.

<sup>489</sup> Richmond Enquirer, n.d., copied in the New York Evening Post, 7 January 1863.

<sup>490</sup> Caleb Cushing to Edward Everett, Newburyport, 26 September 1862, draft, Cushing Papers, Library of Congress.

constitutionality of the Proclamation. In an influential pamphlet, Curtis, a former associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, denied that military necessity justified emancipation and argued that since the seceded states were still technically in the Union, their laws could not be abrogated by the president. Moreover, Congress had provided for emancipation in the Second Confiscation Act. Curtis did not “see that it depends upon his [Lincoln’s] executive decree whether a servile war shall be invoked to help twenty millions of the white race to assert the rightful authority of the Constitution and the laws of their country, over those who refuse to obey them.”<sup>491</sup>

Several prominent attorneys, including Charles P. Kirkland, Charles Mayo Ellis, and Grosvenor P. Lowrey, issued pamphlets challenging Curtis’s arguments. Lincoln read Kirkland’s work, A Letter to the Hon. Benjamin R. Curtis, which he called a “paper of great ability.”<sup>492</sup> Kirkland chastised Curtis for ignoring the reality of wartime conditions: “It is difficult to imagine under what hallucination you were laboring when you gave utterance to those sentiments,” he wrote.<sup>493</sup>

Lincoln appreciated the constitutional argument and would eventually find a way to make emancipation unambiguously legal through an amendment to the Constitution. But for the moment, the implied war powers of the president were cited to justify the mighty act.<sup>494</sup> Professor Theophilus Parsons of the Harvard Law School, temperamentally a conservative, insisted that while the president had no power in peacetime to liberate slaves, “there can be no doubt that he has a constitutional power to do this as a military

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<sup>491</sup> Curtis, Executive Power (Cambridge: H. O. Houghton, 1862), 13.

<sup>492</sup> Lincoln to Kirkland, Washington, 7 December 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:544.

<sup>493</sup> Charles P. Kirkland, A Letter to the Hon. Benjamin R. Curtis (New York: Latimer Bros. & Seymour, 1862), 13.

<sup>494</sup> Guelzo, Emancipation Proclamation, 187-202.



act, grounded on a military necessity; that the Commander-in-chief of our army must have the right to judge of the existence and the force of this necessity.”<sup>495</sup>

When warned that the Proclamation would “would rouse the South as one man and send a force into the field twice as great as then existed,” Lincoln replied: “we’ll double ours then.”<sup>496</sup> According to one resident of Richmond, the “actual effect of the President’s proclamation has been to make the people more determined. They claim that they will now be able to raise ten men voluntarily where they could not raise three before.”<sup>497</sup>

In the evening of New Years Day, Lincoln confided to Indiana Congressman Schuyler Colfax that the “South had fair warning, that if they did not return to their duty, I should strike at this pillar of their strength. The promise must now be kept, and I shall never recall one word.”<sup>498</sup> And he did not.

Lincoln said the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation was “the central act of my administration” as well as “the great event of the nineteenth century” and speculated to Charles Sumner “that the name which is connected with this matter will never be forgotten.”<sup>499</sup> And it has not been.

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<sup>495</sup> Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, 25 October 1862.

<sup>496</sup> Ambrose Burnside told this at a London dinner party. Benjamin Moran diary, 11 December 1869, Library of Congress.

<sup>497</sup> Washington correspondence, 3 October, Cincinnati Commercial, 4 October 1862.

<sup>498</sup> Carpenter, Six Months at the White House, 87.

<sup>499</sup> Edward Everett Hale, Memories of a Hundred Years (2 vols.; New York: Macmillan, 1904), 2:193; Carpenter, Six Months at the White House, 90; Ida M. Tarbell, The Life of Abraham Lincoln (2 vols.; New York: McClure, Phillips, 1900), 2:97-98.

A few weeks after issuing the Proclamation, Lincoln told a group of abolitionists that it had “knocked the bottom out of slavery” but he did not expect “any sudden results from it.”<sup>500</sup> Though not sudden, the results would be profound.

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<sup>500</sup> Moncure Conway, Autobiography, Memories and Experiences (New York: Cassell, 1904), 1:379. This was said on 25 January 1863.