

## Chapter Thirty-two

“I Hope to Stand Firm Enough to Not Go Backward, and Yet  
Not Go Forward Fast Enough to Wreck the Country's Cause”:

Reconstruction and Renomination

(November 1863-June 1864)

In the 1840s and 1850s, Lincoln's love for mathematics had led him not only to master the first six books of Euclid's geometry but also to try solving the ancient riddle of squaring the circle. In late 1863, as prospects for military victory improved, he wrestled with the political equivalent of that puzzle: devising a Reconstruction policy that would protect the rights of the newly freed slaves while simultaneously restoring sectional harmony. To make emancipation more than a paper promise without alienating white Southerners was a daunting challenge, for every measure designed to guarantee the rights of blacks was regarded as an insult by Southern whites.

Lincoln faced several questions. How should the defeated Confederate states and their leaders be treated? Should those states be regarded as conquered provinces, to be molded to the whim of the victor? Should Rebels stand trial for treason? Should amnesty be extended? To whom? How could Southern loyalty to the Union best be restored and the fruits of the war preserved? What should be done to protect the freed slaves? Should

Confederate states be required to accept emancipation before they were restored? Should Congress or the president determine how these questions would be answered?

In dealing with these issues, Lincoln was hard-pressed to keep the Republican coalition intact. Some Radicals, led by Charles Sumner, argued that the rebellious states had committed suicide, reverting to territorial status, and therefore could be regulated by Congress. Those men also wished to emancipate all slaves, confiscate Rebel property, and deny political rights to most Confederates. Understandably fearing that such measures might alienate Unionists in the Border States and the Confederacy as well as Northern Democrats and conservative Republicans, Lincoln took charge of wartime Reconstruction as federal troops occupied Rebel territory.

#### EARLY EXPERIMENTS WITH MILITARY GOVERNORS

Lincoln's initial ad hoc policy was to appoint military governors and rely on Southern Unionists to rehabilitate their states, with some general guidance from the administration. In March 1862, shortly after the capture of Nashville, he named Senator Andrew Johnson a brigadier general and made him governor of Tennessee. Later that year, he selected governors for North Carolina, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Texas. Congress acquiesced at first, but eventually balked. Lincoln and the Radicals were to clash sharply over Reconstruction.

Andrew Johnson, a fierce opponent of secession and the only U.S. senator to remain loyal when his state pulled out of the Union, was given a free hand to restore civilian government to Tennessee as soon as practicable. Lincoln may have made a mistake in appointing the truculent Johnson, who was, according to General William Nelson, "too much embittered to entrust with a mission as delicate as the direction of a

people under the present circumstances.”<sup>1</sup> A wiser choice may have been William B. Campbell, a Mexican War hero and Conservative from Middle Tennessee. Johnson undertook harsh measures, including the arrest of several clergymen, and used inflammatory rhetoric, telling a mass meeting: “Treason must be crushed out and traitors must be punished.”<sup>2</sup>

In July 1862, Lincoln urged Johnson to call an election: “If we could, somehow, get a vote of the people of Tennessee and have it result properly it would be worth more to us than a battle gained.”<sup>3</sup> The president hoped that a civilian government might be persuaded to abolish slavery and accord freed blacks some basic rights. If that could be done, the inevitable white backlash might be minimized, for the momentous changes would be the work of native whites, not Yankee outsiders. Johnson disappointed Lincoln by warning that it would be impossible to hold elections before East Tennessee was pacified.

Conflict between Johnson and military commanders Buell, Halleck, and Rosecrans also chagrined Lincoln, who tactfully tried to harmonize their differences. When Johnson sought to transfer soldiers to Kentucky in order to protect a rail line, the president gently reproved him: “Do you not, my good friend, perceive that what you ask is simply to put you in command in the West. I do not suppose you desire this. You only wish to control in your own localities; but this, you must know, may derange all other

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<sup>1</sup> William C. Harris, With Charity for All: Lincoln and the Restoration of the Union (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 42.

<sup>2</sup> Harris, With Charity for All, 47.

<sup>3</sup> Roy P. Basler et al., eds., The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln (8 vols. plus index; New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55), 5:303.

parts. Can you, not, and will you not, have a full conference with Gen. Halleck?”<sup>4</sup>

Simultaneously Lincoln wired Old Brains: “The Gov. is a true, and a valuable man – indispensable to us in Tennessee. Will you please get in communication with him, and have a full conference with him?”<sup>5</sup>

The Emancipation Proclamation outraged Tennessee Unionists, including Johnson and Congressman Horace Maynard. To placate them, Lincoln agreed to exempt the Volunteer State, even though much of it remained under Confederate control. That drastic step illustrated the lengths to which the president was willing to go in order to accommodate the beleaguered loyalists of East Tennessee. To a pair of them he wrote in August 1863: “I do as much for East Tennessee as I would, or could, if my own home, and family were in Knoxville.” After pointing out the practical difficulties of inserting and maintaining troops in their region, he added: “I know you are too much distressed to be argued with; and therefore I do not attempt it at length. You know I am not indifferent to your troubles; else I should not, more than a year and a half ago, have made the effort I did to have a Railroad built on purpose to relieve you. The Secretary of War, Gen. Halleck, Gen. Burnside, and Gen. Rosecrans are all engaged now in an effort to relieve your section.”<sup>6</sup>

The following month, with Burnside occupying Knoxville and Rosecrans in Chattanooga, the president grew more optimistic. He wrote Governor Johnson: “it is the nick of time for re-inaugerating a loyal State government. Not a moment should be lost. You, and the co-operating friends there, can better judge of the ways and means, than can

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<sup>4</sup> Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:313.

<sup>5</sup> Lincoln to Halleck, Washington, 11 July 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:313.

<sup>6</sup> Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:373.

be judged by any here.” Lincoln warned that opponents of emancipation and the Union war effort must not be allowed to triumph: “The re-inauguration must not be such as to give control of the State, and it's representation in Congress, to the enemies of the Union, driving it's friends there into political exile. The whole struggle for Tennessee will have been profitless to both State and Nation, if it so ends that Gov. Johnson is put down, and Gov. [Isham] Harris is put up. It must not be so. You must have it otherwise. Let the reconstruction be the work of such men only as can be trusted for the Union. Exclude all others, and trust that your government, so organized, will be recognized here, as being the one of republican form, to be guaranteed to the state, and to be protected against invasion and domestic violence. It is something on the question of time, to remember that it can not be known who is next to occupy the position I now hold, nor what he will do. I see that you have declared in favor of emancipation in Tennessee, for which, may God bless you. Get emancipation into your new State government – Constitution – and there will be no such word as fail for your case.”<sup>7</sup>

Rosecrans's defeat at Chickamauga several days later necessarily delayed implementation of the president's plan. In early October, Lincoln told Old Rosy: “If we can hold Chattanooga, and East Tennessee, I think the rebellion must dwindle and die. I think you and Burnside can do this.”<sup>8</sup> He also summoned Johnson to Washington for consultations. Unwisely the governor declined, pleading preoccupation with business. Lincoln's hopes to have Tennessee become the first Confederate state to reestablish loyal civilian government thus came to nothing.

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<sup>7</sup> Lincoln to Johnson, Washington, 11 September 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:440.

<sup>8</sup> Lincoln to Rosecrans, Washington, 4 October 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:498.

A similar attempt in North Carolina also fizzled.<sup>9</sup> In early 1862, Union troops under Burnside had occupied coastal areas of that state. To serve as military governor, Lincoln in May appointed an able, temperamental, and combative North Carolina native, Edward Stanly, then residing in California.<sup>10</sup> A faithful Unionist and a long-time friend of Seward's, Stanly knew well the occupied area, for he had once represented it as a Whig in Congress. There John Quincy Adams called him "a lofty spirit, with a quick perception, an irritable temper, and a sarcastic turn of mind, sparing neither friend nor foe."<sup>11</sup> In North Carolina he enjoyed the reputation of "a man of tact, address and resources" who "knows how to manage men, and possesses the energy and courage requisite to the execution of his designs."<sup>12</sup> Like Johnson, he received carte blanche from the administration.<sup>13</sup> When he pleaded for more explicit instructions, he was simply told to act as a dictator.

Lincoln did, however, urge Stanly to call for congressional elections, but before that step could be undertaken, the governor committed blunders that outraged many Radicals.<sup>14</sup> At New Bern, an idealistic New Yorker named Vincent Colyer, whom Burnside had appointed as superintendent of the poor, founded two schools for blacks and one for whites. When Stanly advised him that state law forbade the education of blacks, Colyer shut the schools down, prompting howls of indignation. People wanted to

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<sup>9</sup> Harris, With Charity for All, 58-72.

<sup>10</sup> See Norman D. Brown, Edward Stanly: Whiggery's Tarheel "Conqueror" (University: University of Alabama Press, 1974).

<sup>11</sup> Charles Francis Adams, ed., Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848 (12 vols.; Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1874-1877), 12:19 (diary entry for 16 September 1841).

<sup>12</sup> David L. Swain to Nicholas Woodfin, 11 May 1862, in Brown, Stanly, 206.

<sup>13</sup> OR, I, 9:396-97.

<sup>14</sup> John F. Potter to his wife, Washington, 15 June 1862, Potter Papers, Wisconsin State Historical Society.

know why Northerners should be “compelled to perpetuate & sustain the barbarism of North Carolina?”<sup>15</sup> When Colyer protested to Charles Sumner, the senator on June 5 escorted him to the White House to explain the situation.<sup>16</sup> As Colyer was relating his tale of woe, the president “with an impatience which Mr. Sumner never encountered from him on any other occasion, exclaimed, ‘Do you take me for a School-Committee-man?’” Lincoln swiftly “changed his tone, and with perfect kindness proceeded to consider the case,” explaining that “he had nothing to do with schools in the States – white or black & would not recall Stanly or rebuke him – tho[ugh] he regretted some things he had done – & the way it was done.”<sup>17</sup>

Among Stanly’s other acts that Lincoln regretted were his return of a fugitive slave and his order mandating inspections of ships to see if bondsmen had stowed away. When Colyer said that Stanly was under the impression that he must enforce local laws in North Carolina, the president “remarked that that was a misapprehension on the part of the Governor” and “that he could have had no such instructions, and if he had they were unlawful.” Lincoln further explained that “no slave who once comes within our lines a fugitive from a rebel, shall ever be returned to his master. For my part I have hated slavery from my childhood.”<sup>18</sup>

Stanly also banished Hinton Rowan Helper’s brother for daring to offer him advice about governing the state. When the president learned the details of Stanly’s conduct, he “said that the idea of closing the schools and sending back fugitive slaves and

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<sup>15</sup> William E. Doubleday to Zachariah Chandler, New York, 3 June 1862, Chandler Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>16</sup> Vincent Colyer, Report of the Services Rendered by the Freed People to the United States Army in North Carolina, in the Spring of 1862, After the Battle of Newbern (New York: V. Colyer, 1864), 43-51.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Sumner: His Complete Works (20 vols.; Boston: Lee & Shepard, 1900), 7:112.

<sup>18</sup> Colyer, Report of the Services Rendered, 51.

searching vessels going North, never had emanated from his administration. Such an order never had been given by him, nor would it be tolerated by him or his administration.” He declared that he was “as much astonished by the acts of Mr. Stanly as any other man in the country, and most heartily disapproved of them.” At the president’s behest, Stanton – who “said he would not remain an hour in connection with a government which would justify such an outrage” – commanded the governor to reopen the black schools.<sup>19</sup> Sumner told a friend that the president “has no sympathy with Stanly in his absurd wickedness, closing the schools, nor again in his other act of turning our camp into a hunting ground for Slaves. He repudiates both – positively.”<sup>20</sup>

But Lincoln would not fire Stanly. When a delegation of abolitionists urged that the governor be removed, he asked them to suggest a replacement. One asserted that it would be better to have nobody serving as military governor rather than a man out of sympathy with the president’s policy. When another proposed Frémont, Lincoln replied that he had “great respect” for the Pathfinder, “but the fact is that the pioneer in any movement is not generally the best man to carry that movement to a successful issue.” The delegation was convinced that Lincoln, for “all his forensic ability and his personal virtues, was not competent to grapple with the tremendous combination of issues before him.”<sup>21</sup> Antislavery militants lamented that “the President is cautious & a little vacillating about suppressing Stanly.”<sup>22</sup> Indignantly the abolitionist minister George B. Cheever

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<sup>19</sup> Washington correspondence, 9 June, National Anti-Slavery Standard (New York), 14 June 1862.

<sup>20</sup> Sumner to an unidentified correspondent, 5 June 1862, The Liberator (Boston), 20 June 1862.

<sup>21</sup> Moncure Conway, Autobiography: Memories and Experiences (2 vols.; London: Cassell, 1904), 1:379-80, 383.

<sup>22</sup> Henry W. Bellows to his son, Washington, 7 June 1862, Bellows Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.



called Lincoln's unwillingness to remove the governor "the worst outrage yet committed, the most impious and heaven defying."<sup>23</sup>

The demand for Stanly's ouster was rooted in a fundamental policy disagreement between Lincoln and the Radicals. The president believed that Southern Unionism could be mobilized to restore Confederate states and help speed the end of the war. The Radicals, with good reason, thought Lincoln overestimated the number of Southern Unionists and misguidedly tailored his policies to accommodate their conservative views. The Radicals also objected to the appointment of Stanly without senate confirmation.

In the Stanly-Colyer dispute, Burnside urged Lincoln to back the governor, whose opinions, said the general, had been misrepresented.<sup>24</sup> Though not endorsing Stanly's school policy, Lincoln publicly expressed general support for him. The president evidently shared the view of a New York Tribune correspondent who reported from North Carolina that the governor was damned if he did and damned if he didn't: "If Mr. Stanly returns slaves he is denounced by the north and its army; if he fails to enforce the . . . law, he is hated by the very people he is sent to conciliate. He may try to trim his sails to either breeze, but in vain."<sup>25</sup>

The governor threatened to resign immediately after Lincoln announced his intention to issue an Emancipation Proclamation. The president dissuaded him by explaining that he had prepared that document under intense Radical pressure. Stanly summarized their conversation to the editor of the Washington National Intelligencer, who recorded in his diary that "Mr. Stanly said that the President had stated to him that

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<sup>23</sup> George B. Cheever to his sister Elizabeth Washburn, n.p., 3 June 1862, Cheever Family Papers, American Antiquarian Society.

<sup>24</sup> OR, I, 9:395-96.

<sup>25</sup> New York Tribune, semiweekly ed., 20 June 1862.

the proclamation had become a civil necessity to prevent the Radicals from openly embarrassing the government in the conduct of the war. The President expressed the belief that, without the proclamation for which they had been clamoring, the Radicals would take the extreme step in Congress of withholding supplies for carrying on the war – leaving the whole land in anarchy. Mr. Lincoln said that he had prayed to the Almighty to save him from this necessity, adopting the very language of our Saviour, 'If it be possible, let this cup pass from me,' but the prayer had not been answered."<sup>26</sup> This disingenuous statement was an example of Lincoln's tendency to dissemble in order to win support for emancipation.<sup>27</sup>

On September 29, the president further mollified Stanly by generously praising him: "Your conduct as Military Governor of that State . . . has my entire approbation; and it is with great satisfaction that I learn you are now to return in the same capacity, with the approbation of the War Department." Lincoln reminded the governor that the Emancipation Proclamation exempted areas where elections for the U.S. Congress had been held: "I shall be much gratified if you can find it practicable to have congressional elections held in that State before January. It is my sincere wish that North Carolina may again govern herself conformably to the constitution of the United States."<sup>28</sup> As he had done with the Border States, Lincoln used the threat of emancipation as a goad to encourage Confederates to return to the Union. But the offer would expire on January 1. Fearing that unsuitable candidates might win and that very few voters would turn out,

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<sup>26</sup> James C. Welling diary entry for 27 September 1862, in Allen Thorndike Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln, by Distinguished Men of His Time (New York: North American, 1886), 533.

<sup>27</sup> See Lawanda Cox, Lincoln and Black Freedom: A Study in Presidential Leadership (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1981).

<sup>28</sup> Lincoln to Stanly, Washington, 29 September 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:545.

Stanly delayed calling an election; eventually he ordered one for New Years Day, too late to qualify for the exemption.<sup>29</sup> In the event, a small voter turnout made the election of congressmen seem illegitimate, and nothing came of it except Stanly's resignation on January 15. The governor told Lincoln that the Emancipation Proclamation "crushes all hope of making peace by any conciliatory measures. It will fill the hearts of Union men with despair, and strengthen the hands of the detestable traitors whose mad ambition has spread desolation and sorrow over our country. To the negroes themselves it will bring the most direful calamities."<sup>30</sup>

Stanly's tenure proved a failure, though the fault was not so much his as it was the inability of the Union Army to pacify the Tarheel State or to whip the Army of Northern Virginia. Lincoln appointed no successor to Stanly, evidently because he realized that there were too few Unionists in North Carolina to make the restoration of the state's civil government possible until more territory was occupied.<sup>31</sup>

Lincoln enjoyed greater success in reconstructing Louisiana, where he appointed Colonel George S. Shepley military governor in June 1862 to preside over New Orleans and nearby parishes. Shepley, a native of Maine, had already served as military mayor of the Crescent City, a post to which General Benjamin F. Butler had named him. Like Stanly and Johnson, he received minimal instructions from the administration. The timid Shepley proved a disappointment, for he regarded himself as the agent of Butler rather than a policy maker in his own right.

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<sup>29</sup> Brown, Stanly, 242-44.

<sup>30</sup> Stanly to Lincoln, 15 January 1863 in Congressional Committee Reports, 40<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session, report 7, 731-32 (Impeachment Investigation: Testimony Taken before the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives).

<sup>31</sup> Brown, Stanly, 253.

Louisiana represented a model for neighboring states to emulate, as George Boutwell, who was to play a key role in the Reconstruction drama, pointed out: “If one State even would frame a constitution and ask for admission a precedent would be established for all the others. Louisiana is so situated, geographically and commercially, that her lead would compel Texas, Arkansas, and Mississippi to follow.”<sup>32</sup>

The massive influx of blacks into New Orleans seriously challenged the new government. Shepley and Butler tried to staunch the flow, but General John S. Phelps, the Vermont abolitionist whose proclamation had so incensed Lincoln a few months earlier, welcomed freed slaves into his camp. When informed that Phelps’ policy was crushing Union sentiment in Louisiana, the president tartly dismissed the complaint as “a false pretense.” Residents of Louisiana and “all intelligent people every where,” he wrote in early July, “know full well, that I never had a wish to touch the foundations of their society, or any right of theirs. With perfect knowledge of this, they forced a necessity upon me to send armies among them, and it is their own fault, not mine, that they are annoyed by the presence of General Phelps. They also know the remedy – know how to be cured of General Phelps. Remove the necessity of his presence. And might it not be well for them to consider whether they have not already had time enough to do this? If they can conceive of anything worse than General Phelps, within my power, would they not better be looking out for it? They very well know the way to avert all this is simply to take their place in the Union upon the old terms. If they will not do this, should they not receive harder blows rather than lighter ones?” Hinting that he might issue an emancipation order, he said portentously: “I am a patient man – always willing to forgive

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<sup>32</sup> Boutwell to N. P. Banks, Washington, 26 May 1863, Banks Papers, Library of Congress.

on the Christian terms of repentance; and also to give ample time for repentance. Still I must save this government if possible. What I cannot do, of course I will not do; but it may as well be understood, once for all, that I shall not surrender this game leaving any available card unplayed.”<sup>33</sup>

By late July 1862, Lincoln had grown exasperated with the slow pace of Reconstruction efforts in Louisiana. He reproved New Orleans Unionists Cuthbert Bullitt and Thomas J. Durant for foot-dragging and for whining about the trials and tribulations of loyal slave owners: “Of course the rebellion will never be suppressed in Louisiana, if the professed Union men there will neither help to do it, nor permit the government to do it without their help.” Those “people of Louisiana who wish protection to person and property, have but to reach forth their hands and take it. Let them, in good faith, reinaugurate the national authority, and set up a State Government conforming thereto under the constitution. They know how to do it, and can have the protection of the Army while doing it. The Army will be withdrawn so soon as such State government can dispense with its presence; and the people of the State can then upon the old Constitutional terms, govern themselves to their own liking. This is very simple and easy.”<sup>34</sup>

When told that another Louisiana Unionist complained about the vagueness of the administration’s policies, Lincoln asked heatedly: “Why will he not read and understand what I have said? The substance of the very declaration he desires is in the inaugural, in each of the two regular messages to Congress, and in many, if not all, the minor

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<sup>33</sup> Lincoln to Reverdy Johnson, Washington, 26 July 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:342-43.

<sup>34</sup> Lincoln to Cuthbert Bullitt, Washington, 28 July 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:344-46.

documents issued by the Executive since the inauguration. Broken eggs cannot be mended; but Louisiana has nothing to do now but to take her place in the Union as it was, barring the already broken eggs. The sooner she does so, the smaller will be the amount of that which will be past mending. This government cannot much longer play a game in which it stakes all, and its enemies stake nothing. Those enemies must understand that they cannot experiment for ten years trying to destroy the government, and if they fail still come back into the Union unhurt. If they expect in any contingency to ever have the Union as it was, I join with the writer in saying, ‘Now is the time.’”<sup>35</sup>

Impatient with Governor Shepley’s failure to organize an election, Lincoln tried to galvanize him as well as General Butler and their associates. He sent them a message via Louisiana Congressman John E. Bouligny, who, the president said, sought to promote elections for the U.S. House in the two districts under Union control. All men there who “desire to avoid the unsatisfactory prospect [of emancipation] before them, and to have peace again upon the old terms under the constitution of the United States,” were invited to participate. Union authorities were to “give the people a chance to express their wishes at these elections. Follow forms of law as far as convenient, but at all events get the expression of the largest number of the people possible. All see how such action will connect with, and affect the proclamation of September 22nd. Of course the men elected should be gentlemen of character, willing to swear support to the constitution, as of old, and known to be above reasonable suspicion of duplicity.”<sup>36</sup>

When this ploy failed to spur Shepley into action, Lincoln wrote him directly on November 21 expressing annoyance. “I wish elections for Congressmen to take place in

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<sup>35</sup> Lincoln to August Belmont, Washington, 31 July 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:350.

<sup>36</sup> Lincoln to Butler, Washington, 14 October 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:462-63.

Louisiana,” he reiterated, but added significantly that “I wish it to be a movement of the people of the Districts, and not a movement of our military and quasi-military, authorities there. I merely wish our authorities to give the people a chance – to protect them against secession interference. Of course the election can not be according to strict law – by state law, there is, I suppose, no election day, before January; and the regular election officers will not act, in many cases, if in any. These knots must be cut, the main object being to get an expression of the people. If they would fix a day and a way, for themselves, all the better; but if they stand idle not seeming to know what to do, do you fix these things for them by proclamation. And do not waste a day about it; but, fix the election day early enough that we can hear the result here by the first of January. Fix a day for an election in all the Districts, and have it held in as many places as you can.”<sup>37</sup>

In fact, unbeknownst to Lincoln, Shepley had arranged to hold congressional elections on December 3. That day, over 7700 voters turned out and chose the moderate Michael Hahn and the more radical Benjamin F. Flanders as U.S. Representatives. In December, when those gentlemen arrived in Washington to take their seats, a fierce debate ensued. Radicals had come to regret allowing the president a free hand in the Reconstruction process, especially their earlier decision to seat congressmen elected under his auspices in Virginia and Tennessee. As a result, those areas of the occupied South would be exempt from the impending Emancipation Proclamation. Some Democrats joined the Radicals in objecting to presidential Reconstruction. Lincoln was furious when told that Congress might refuse to seat Flanders and Hahn. “Then I am to be bullied, am I?” he exploded. “I’ll be d—d if I will.” Eventually the House accepted their

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<sup>37</sup> Lincoln to Shepley, Washington, 21 November 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:504-5.

credentials.<sup>38</sup> Lincoln confided to Flanders that “there was a strong effort to break down” his administration and urged the congressman to support him.<sup>39</sup>

Lincoln regarded the seating of Flanders and Hahn as a major victory for his Reconstruction policy, but it was a false dawn. Congress rejected the credentials of all other congressmen elected from Confederate states, and little progress was made in 1863 toward restoring of civil government in Louisiana, even though the politically experienced General Nathaniel P. Banks became military commander there in December 1862.

Squabbles between the Radicals, who dominated Louisiana’s Free State Committee, and the Conservatives, represented by the Executive Central Committee, frustrated Lincoln. In June 1863, when a spokesman for the latter group, Thomas Cottman, asked him to restore Louisiana under the antebellum constitution (which sanctioned slavery) and hold elections in November, the president demurred, insisting that “a respectable portion of the Louisiana people desire to amend their State constitution, and contemplate holding a convention for that object.” By itself, that “is a sufficient reason why the general government should not give the committal you seek, to the existing State constitution.” While the president could not “perceive how such committal could facilitate our military operations in Louisiana,” he said he did “really apprehend it might be so used as to embarrass them.” As for elections in November, he assured them that “there is abundant time, without any order, or proclamation from me just now. The people of Louisiana shall not lack an opportunity of a fair election for both

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<sup>38</sup> John P. Usher interviewed by Nicolay, 8 October 1878, in Michael Burlingame, ed., An Oral History of Abraham Lincoln: John G. Nicolay’s Interviews and Essays (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 67; Usher in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 93.

<sup>39</sup> Benjamin F. Flanders to Lincoln, New Orleans, 16 January 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.



Federal and State officers, by want of anything within my power to give them.” This rebuff to Cottman indicated that Lincoln was throwing his weight behind the Free State Committee, but doing so discreetly, for he wished to preserve harmony among the badly outnumbered Unionists. As he told Cottman, he strongly wished that “in Louisiana and elsewhere, all sincere Union men would stoutly eschew cliqueism, and, each yielding something in minor matters, all work together. Nothing is likely to be so baleful in the great work before us, as stepping aside of the main object to consider who will get the offices if a small matter shall go thus, and who else will get them, if it shall go otherwise. It is a time now for real patriots to rise above all this.”<sup>40</sup>

In early August 1863, Lincoln virtually ordered the implementation of the radical Free State Committee’s program. When word reached Washington that an effort was underway to hold a constitutional convention, he spelled out to Banks his hopes for reconstruction in Louisiana. He would be glad if the Bayou State would “make a new Constitution recognizing the emancipation proclamation, and adopting emancipation in those parts of the state to which the proclamation does not apply.” He also desired to see Louisianans “adopt some practical system by which the two races could gradually live themselves out of their old relation to each other, and both come out better prepared for the new. Education for young blacks should be included in the plan.” A contract system appeared to him best suited for that purpose. Lincoln strongly suggested that Louisiana should form a new constitution and hold elections before Congress met in early December. Even if the voters did not provide for the abolition of slavery, Lincoln said he would “not, in any event, retract the emancipation proclamation; nor, as executive, ever

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<sup>40</sup> Lincoln to Thomas Cottman, Washington, 15 December 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 7:66-67; Cox, Lincoln and Black Freedom, 54.

return to slavery any person who is free by the terms of that proclamation, or by any of the acts of Congress.”<sup>41</sup> Though he did not want his letter made public, he authorized Banks to show it to people who he thought should know the administration’s wishes (presumably the convention delegates). He told Banks that he was offering advice not orders, but when he sent copies of the letter to the Free State Committee leaders – Flanders, Hahn, and Durant – he added the endorsement: “Please observe my directions to him.”<sup>42</sup> Significantly he did not say suggestions but rather directions. Banks replied that he would execute Lincoln’s orders. He did not say suggestions.

The emphasis on directions appeared in orders that Stanton, speaking for the president, sent to Governor Shepley, clearly instructing him to arrange for a constitutional convention. Loyal citizens (presumably including free blacks) were to be registered and an election held within a month of the completion of that process. Apportionment of the delegates would favor New Orleans, where the radical Free State General Committee was stronger than the conservative Executive Central Committee. Lincoln had long been trying to strike a balance between those two organizations, but now he decided to support the former. Discussing Louisiana Reconstruction with George Boutwell, the president said “that he desired the return of the states upon the old basis, substantially, making provision of emancipation of the slaves, and, if possible, securing them homes.”<sup>43</sup>

With Banks distracted by military matters, Shepley was left to carry out these presidential directives. In November 1863, upon learning that the governor had not already done so, Lincoln scolded Banks. The failure to register voters “disappoints me

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<sup>41</sup> Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:365.

<sup>42</sup> Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:366.

<sup>43</sup> Boutwell to N. P. Banks, Washington, 26 May 1863, Banks Papers, Library of Congress.

bitterly,” he told the general, adding that he did not blame Banks or the Free State leaders. But he urged them to “lose no more time.” Bluntly he stated his wish that they should, “without waiting for more territory” to be occupied, promptly “go to work and give me a tangible nucleus which the remainder of the State may rally around as fast as it can, and which I can at once recognize and sustain as the true State government. And in that work I wish you, and all under your command, to give them a hearty sympathy and support. The instruction to Gov. Shepley bases the movement (and rightfully too) upon the loyal element. Time is important. There is danger, even now, that the adverse element seeks insidiously to pre-occupy the ground. If a few professedly loyal men shall draw the disloyal about them, and colorably set up a State government, repudiating the emancipation proclamation, and re-establishing slavery, I can not recognize or sustain their work. I should fall powerless in the attempt. This government, in such an attitude, would be a house divided against itself.” Here Lincoln seemed to renege on his pledge to exempt part of Louisiana from the Emancipation Proclamation; the entire state, including the occupied areas, must abolish slavery if it wished to be restored.<sup>44</sup>

From Louisiana, Benjamin F. Flanders reported to Chase: “The letter from the President to General Banks urging him and all under his authority to aid us to establish a State government has had the desired effect. All Departments of the Government now appear on the same side.”<sup>45</sup> Chase rejoiced that the president was shifting toward the Radical position. Lincoln “advances slowly but yet he advances,” the treasury secretary told Horace Greeley. “On the whole, when one thinks of the short time, and immense

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<sup>44</sup> Lincoln to Banks, Washington, 5 November 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 7:1.

<sup>45</sup> Flanders to Chase, New Orleans, 12 December 1863, Chase Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

distance, in the matter of personal Freedom, between the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 1861 and the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 1863 the progressives cannot be dissatisfied with the results.”<sup>46</sup>

The president grudgingly supported Banks’s controversial system of half-way freedom. It provided that slaves in areas of Louisiana exempt from the Emancipation Proclamation would contract with planters and farmers of their choice for wages, clothing and housing in return for their labor, but they would not be allowed to leave the farm or plantation without the army’s permission. Their children were permitted to attend schools that the army would establish. Physical punishment was forbidden, and employers were to set aside one acre for each black family to grow its own produce. Contracts were to be for one year.<sup>47</sup> “I have said, and say again,” Lincoln wrote, “that if a new State government, acting in harmony with this [federal] government, and consistently with general freedom, shall think best to adopt a reasonable temporary arrangement, in relation to the landless and homeless freed people, I do not object; but my word is out to be for and not against them on the question of their permanent freedom. I do not insist upon such temporary arrangement, but only say such would not be objectionable to me.”<sup>48</sup>

Months earlier, Lincoln had told General John McClelland that he would accept the implementation of “systems of apprenticeship for the colored people, conforming substantially to the most approved plans of gradual emancipation.”<sup>49</sup> Similarly, he had written Stephen A. Hurlbut, commanding general at Memphis, that the employment of freed slaves was “a difficult subject – the most difficult with which we have to deal. The

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<sup>46</sup> Chase to Greeley, Washington, 9 October 1863, John Niven, ed., The Salmon P. Chase Papers (5 vols.; Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1993-1998), 4:150-151.

<sup>47</sup> Louis S. Gerteis, From Contraband to Freedman: Federal Policy Toward Southern Blacks (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press: 1973), 65-82.

<sup>48</sup> Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 7:1-2.

<sup>49</sup> Lincoln to McClelland, Washington, 8 January 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:48-49.

able bodied male contrabands are already employed by the Army. But the rest are in confusion and destitution. They better be set to digging their subsistence out of the ground. If there are plantations near you, on either side of the river, which are abandoned by their owners, first put as many contrabands on such, as they will hold – that is, as can draw subsistence from them. If some still remain, get loyal men, of character in the vicinity, to take them temporarily on wages, to be paid to the contrabands themselves – such men obliging themselves to not let the contrabands be kidnapped, or forcibly carried away. Of course, if any voluntarily make arrangements to work for their living, you will not hinder them. It is thought best to leave details to your discretion subject to the provisions of the acts of Congress & the orders of the War Department.”<sup>50</sup>

Horace Greeley spoke for many Radicals when he denounced Banks’s “free labor” scheme: “Gen. Banks appears to have yielded without hesitation or reluctance to every demand which the grasping avarice, the hostility to freedom, the hatred to the policy of the Government, the cunning selfishness and the inhumanity of the Louisiana slavemasters can have induced them to make.”<sup>51</sup> Such criticism was unfair, for Banks was helping pave the way to freedom and economic independence for slaves in areas exempt from the Emancipation Proclamation. He expected the plantations would soon be broken up and blacks would eventually possess their own farms.<sup>52</sup>

Before Congress met in December 1863, Lincoln made yet another attempt to restart the sputtering Reconstruction process in Louisiana. As a preliminary measure, Ben Butler had suggested that a referendum be conducted to determine if voters would like to

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<sup>50</sup> Lincoln to Hurlbut, Washington, [ca. August 15?] 186[3], draft, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:387.

<sup>51</sup> Harris, With Charity for All, 114.

<sup>52</sup> Cox, Lincoln and Black Freedom, 131-33.

call a constitutional convention and repeal the ordinance of secession. On November 9, the president commended this proposal to Benjamin Flanders, even though it meant tacitly acknowledging the legitimacy of secession.<sup>53</sup> Nothing came of it. By December, hopes for speedy progress in Louisiana were fading fast.

In nearby Arkansas, Lincoln's attempt to promote elections also foundered. The military governor, Missouri Congressman John S. Phelps, was frustrated by the failure of the Union army to occupy much territory. In 1863, the president tried to enlist the aid of William K. Sebastian, who had resigned his U.S. Senate seat when Arkansas pulled out of the Union. Learning that Sebastian planned to ask for reinstatement, Lincoln told General Hurlbut that Sebastian's application might have profound significance: "It may be so presented as to be one of the very greatest national importance," affecting Reconstruction. If Sebastian could persuade Arkansans to form a government and adopt gradual emancipation, Lincoln wrote, "I at least should take great interest in his case; and I believe a single individual will have scarcely done the world so great a service." He added that of course the "emancipation proclamation applies to Arkansas. I think it is valid in law, and will be so held by the courts. I think I shall not retract or repudiate it. Those who shall have tasted actual freedom I believe can never be slaves, or quasi slaves again. For the rest, I believe some plan, substantially being gradual emancipation, would be better for both white and black. . . . It should begin at once, giving at least the new-born, a vested interest in freedom, which could not be taken away."<sup>54</sup> This initiative led nowhere, for Sebastian rejected the president's overture.

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<sup>53</sup> Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 7:6.

<sup>54</sup> Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:358.

Attempts at self-reconstruction in Texas suffered a like fate. The failure of N. P. Banks' assault at Sabine Pass in September 1863, followed by that general's more disastrous Red River campaign in the spring of 1864, left Military Governor Andrew Jackson Hamilton little to preside over beyond a small coastal enclave around Brownsville.

#### FOILING A COUP: THE ETHERIDGE PLOT

By December 1863, Lincoln realized that his ad hoc arrangement of military governors promoting reconstruction, in cooperation with Southern Unionists, needed overhauling.<sup>55</sup> "However it may have been in the past, I think the country now is ready for radical measures," he told a caller.<sup>56</sup> To replace the failed approach, he devised a more systematic one that he spelled out in his annual message to Congress and in an accompanying Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction.

But before issuing those momentous documents, Lincoln was forced to help squelch a parliamentary coup by the clerk of the House of Representatives, former Congressman Emerson Etheridge of Tennessee. A strong Unionist but bitter opponent of abolition, Etheridge had supported the administration's policies until emancipation became a war aim.<sup>57</sup> Liberating the slaves he regarded as "treachery to the Union men of the South."<sup>58</sup> During the organization of the new Thirty-eighth Congress, Etheridge, a

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<sup>55</sup> Herman Belz, Reconstructing the Union: Theory and Policy During the Civil War (Ithaca: published for the American Historical Association by the Cornell University Press, 1969), 126-67.

<sup>56</sup> Washington correspondence by Van [D. W. Bartlett], 24 November, Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 28 November 1863.

<sup>57</sup> Herman Belz, "The Etheridge Conspiracy of 1863: A Projected Conservative Coup," Journal of Southern History 36 (1970): 549-67; Lonnie E. Mannes, "Emerson Etheridge and the Union," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 48 (1989): 102-3.

<sup>58</sup> Etheridge to Richard W. Thompson, Washington, 23 March 1863, Thompson Papers, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne.

crafty schemer, planned to exclude Republican Representatives on a technicality while admitting Conservatives from Louisiana, thus giving Democrats control of the House. The possibility of such a coup alarmed many, including Congressman Henry L. Dawes of Massachusetts, who remarked: “I can think of nothing but a Bull run so disastrous to our cause as that they might hear in Richmond and abroad that our own House of Representatives was in a state of Revolution.”<sup>59</sup>

Sharing Dawes’s concern, Lincoln mobilized Republicans to thwart Etheridge. He received word of the plot from the postmaster at Chattanooga, who suggested a way to head it off. Etheridge planned to deny Republicans their seats because their certificates were not precisely worded in accordance with the requirements of the Constitution and the laws of their states. These cases would be referred to the House committee on elections. To checkmate him, the president was advised to make sure that all Republican congressmen obtained correct certificates from their governors.<sup>60</sup> Lincoln immediately conferred with the assistant clerk of the House, John R. Briggs, who offered practical advice on amended certificates.<sup>61</sup> An act of Congress passed earlier that year authorized the clerk of the House to “make a roll of the representatives elect, and place thereon the names of all persons, and of such persons only, whose credentials show that they were regularly elected in accordance with the laws of their States respectively, or the laws of the United States.” Citing this statute, Lincoln wrote to several Republican leaders suggesting that loyal state governors make out certificates conforming exactly to the

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<sup>59</sup> Dawes to his wife Electa, Washington, 8 December 1863, Dawes Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>60</sup> James R. Hood to Lincoln, Chattanooga, 22 October 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>61</sup> John R. Briggs, Jr., to Lincoln, Washington, 24 October 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.



letter of the law. He included printed copies of such a certificate.<sup>62</sup> Lincoln even contemplated using force against Etheridge. The night before the new House convened, he told Congressman Schuyler Colfax of Indiana to make “sure to have all our men there. Then if Mr. Etheridge undertakes revolutionary proceedings, let him be carried out on a chip, and let our men organize the house. If the worst comes to the worst a file of ‘Invalids’ [soldiers in the Invalid Brigade] may be held convenient to take care of him.”<sup>63</sup> Congressman Owen Lovejoy, a clergyman who also thought force might be needed, said that if it came “to a question of muscle,” he could “whip Etheridge.”<sup>64</sup>

The next day, Etheridge’s attempt to exclude sixteen Republican congressmen was defeated by a 94-74 vote, obviating the need for Lovejoy’s muscle or Invalid Brigade troops. Significantly influencing the result was the willingness of several Representatives from Border States to side with the Republicans. A journalist scornfully observed that the “impotent exhibition of petty spite and malice, exhibited by Clerk Etheridge, resulted only in his disgraceful failure.”<sup>65</sup>

(The following year, when it was suggested that journalist Whitelaw Reid publish information embarrassing to Etheridge, Lincoln vetoed the idea, saying: “No, Reid, I would not do it. Emerson ain’t worth more than a squirrel load of powder anyway.”)<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Lincoln to James W. Grimes, Washington, 29 October 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:546.

<sup>63</sup> Nicolay, memorandum, 6 December 1863, in Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 121.

<sup>64</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), 121 (entry for 9 December 1863).

<sup>65</sup> Washington correspondence, 7 December, Cincinnati Commercial, 10 December 1863.

<sup>66</sup> Reid to John Hay, n.d., in Royal Cortissoz, The Life of Whitelaw Reid (2 vols.; New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1921), 2:130.

Before Congress assembled, Lincoln worried about the choice of a new Speaker of the House to replace Galusha Grow, who had lost his reelection bid. The most likely candidate, Schuyler Colfax of Indiana, he considered “a little intriguer, – plausible, aspiring beyond his capacity, and not trustworthy.”<sup>67</sup> Moreover, Colfax was aligning himself with the pro-Chase Radicals.

To challenge the Indiana congressman, Lincoln suggested to Frank Blair, then serving as a corps commander in Grant’s army, that he take the seat in Congress to which he had been elected by the voters of Missouri and help organize the House. Through his brother Montgomery, Blair asked if Lincoln would prefer him to remain in the army or serve in Congress. On November 2, the president replied that he wanted Frank to come to Washington, resign his army commission, “take his seat, go into caucus with our friends, abide the nominations, help elect the nominees, and thus aid to organize a House of Representatives which will really support the government in the war. If the result shall be the election of himself as Speaker, let him serve in that position; if not, let him re-take his commission, and return to the Army. For the country this will heal a dangerous schism; for him, it will relieve from a dangerous position. By a misunderstanding, as I think, he is in danger of being permanently separated from those with whom only he can ever have a real sympathy – the sincere opponents of slavery.” (In September, Blair had infuriated Radicals by publicly attacking Chase.) “It will be a mistake if he shall allow the provocations offered him by insincere time-servers, to drive him out of the house of his own building. He is young yet. He has abundant talent – quite enough to occupy all his time, without devoting any to temper. He is rising in military skill and usefulness. His

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<sup>67</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), 1:481 (entry for December 1863 – no day of the month indicated).

recent appointment to the command of a corps, by one so competent to judge as Gen. Sherman, proves this. In that line he can serve both the country and himself more profitably than he could as a member of congress on the floor.”<sup>68</sup> After sending this letter, Lincoln said: “I don’t know whether Frank will do this or not, but it will show durned quick whether he’s honest or not.”<sup>69</sup>

Blair took the president’s advice, though army commitments delayed his arrival in Washington until January, by which time Colfax had been chosen Speaker. Blair’s inability to reach the capital in time to help organize the House should have led him to resign his seat, but he relished the opportunity to defeat his Radical opponents.<sup>70</sup> (Edward McPherson, a Pennsylvania congressman defeated for reelection in 1862, replaced Etheridge as clerk.)

#### RECONSTRUCTING RECONSTRUCTION: THE TEN PERCENT PLAN

As the president was composing his annual message to Congress, Michigan Senator Zachariah Chandler urged him to ignore conservative advice: “You are today master of the Situation if You stand firm. The people have endorsed You gloriously.”<sup>71</sup> Lincoln assured Chandler that he hoped “to ‘stand firm’ enough to not go backward, and yet not go forward fast enough to wreck the country's cause.”<sup>72</sup> At the same time, the

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<sup>68</sup> Lincoln to Montgomery Blair, Washington, 2 November 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:554-55.

<sup>69</sup> Whitelaw Reid to Horace Greeley, Washington, 2 November 1863, Cortissoz, Reid, 1:107.

<sup>70</sup> William Ernest Smith, The Francis Preston Blair Family in Politics (2 vols.; New York: Macmillan, 1933), 2:252.

<sup>71</sup> Chandler to Lincoln, Detroit, 15 November 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>72</sup> Lincoln to Chandler, Washington, 20 November 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 7:24.

president agreed with Seward that it was important to bring “over to our side the honest War Democrats.”<sup>73</sup>

And so Lincoln decided to offer a plan that he hoped would appeal to Republican Radicals and Moderates, to War Democrats, and to Southern Unionists. Like his earlier effort, it was rooted in his sensible belief that Southern white backlash against emancipation would be diluted if voters in the Confederate states themselves organized loyal governments, applied for restoration, and abolished slavery. Some reports from the South indicated that if the administration held Confederate leaders strictly accountable for the war but granted amnesty to other Confederates, such a step would be hailed in the South as “magnanimous, noble, and great” and might well induce wavering Confederates to surrender, confident that they would receive lenient treatment.<sup>74</sup> Recent military developments predisposed many non-slaveholders in the South to accept a generous amnesty. In October, when General Rosecrans recommended granting amnesty to most Rebels, Lincoln replied: “I intend doing something like what you suggest, whenever the case shall appear ripe enough to have it accepted in the true understanding, rather than a confession of weakness and fear.”<sup>75</sup>

The president’s long-standing faith in Southern Unionism received a boost during the summer and fall of 1863. In late October, some Arkansas Unionists who were heartened by General Frederick Steele’s capture of Little Rock proposed a constitutional convention to meet in January. Elections for delegates were underway as Lincoln penned his message to Congress. Meanwhile, in North Carolina, a strong peace movement

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<sup>73</sup> Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 119 (entry for 28 November 1863).

<sup>74</sup> Nashville Press, n.d., copied in the Philadelphia Inquirer, 5 January 1864; John S. Brien to William H. Seward, Nashville, 21 July 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>75</sup> Lincoln to Rosecrans, Washington, 4 October 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:498.

emerged, led by William Woods Holden of Raleigh. Lincoln heartily endorsed an appeal to Governor Zebulon Vance to accept a peace based on reunion, emancipation, and full citizenship rights for Confederates.

In August, Lincoln optimistically predicted that the rebellion was on the verge of collapse. Jefferson Davis's government depended completely on the army, he said, "not only against us, but against his own people. If that were crushed out, they would be ready to swing back to their old bearings."<sup>76</sup> This was wishful thinking, for Southern disaffection with the Richmond government was not rooted in Unionism but in anger at the failure of Confederate arms, at the Davis administration's inability to guarantee social order, and at its encroachment upon individual and states rights. Peace supporters in the South desired a negotiated end to hostilities only if it would guarantee independence. Just as he had done in the secession crisis, Lincoln overestimated the strength of white Southerners' devotion to the Union.

Laboring under that misapprehension, the president devised a scheme known as the Ten Per Cent plan. It allowed for the restoration of rebellious states after a number of voters equal to one-tenth of the electorate casting ballots in 1860 took an oath of future loyalty to the Union and of willingness to accept emancipation. (Some Confederates would be ineligible for this amnesty, including military and civilian leaders, those who resigned commissions in the U.S. military or federal legislative and judicial posts to join the rebellion, or who mistreated captured black troops or their white officers.) Once that threshold was reached, the state could hold elections and rejoin the Union, with all the

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<sup>76</sup> Burlingame and Ettliger, eds., Hay Diary, 71 (entry for 6 August 1863).

rights and privileges it had enjoyed before the war. The oath-takers, too, would have all their former rights restored, except the right to own slaves.

Lincoln appended this Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction to his annual message to Congress, which explained why the loyalty oath required acceptance of emancipation. Characteristically, he stressed its practical benefits. The wartime laws and proclamations regarding slavery, he said, “were enacted and put forth for the purpose of aiding in the suppression of the rebellion. To give them their fullest effect, there had to be a pledge for their maintenance. In my judgment they have aided and will further aid, the cause for which they were intended.” To abandon them now would be “to relinquish a lever of power.” But in addition to such pragmatic concerns, Lincoln forcefully stated moral objections to backsliding on emancipation. Any reneging “would also be a cruel and astounding breach of faith.” As long as he remained president, Lincoln promised, “I shall not attempt to retract or modify the emancipation proclamation; nor shall I return to slavery any person who is free by the terms of that proclamation, or by any of the acts of Congress.” But, he added, Congress or the Supreme Court could modify the oath.

While Lincoln’s proclamation did not allow Confederate states to retain slavery, they could keep their antebellum political framework. The administration would not object if a restored state government provided a system of apprenticeship for freed slaves, so long as that government “shall recognize and declare their permanent freedom, provide for their education, and which [system] may yet be consistent, as a temporary arrangement, with their present condition as a laboring, landless, and homeless class.” Lincoln justified this concession as a necessary expedient to reduce “the confusion and destitution which must, at best, attend all classes by a total revolution of labor throughout

whole States.” In addition, more Confederates might be inclined to surrender if “this vital matter be left to themselves.” But ex-Confederates would not be allowed to mistreat the freed people: “no power of the national Executive to prevent an abuse is abridged by the proposition.”

To counter objections that his proposal was premature, Lincoln stressed that Rebels might be more predisposed to surrender if they knew they would be treated generously. He noted that in some occupied Confederate states, “the elements for resumption seem ready for action, but remain inactive, apparently for want of a rallying point – a plan of action.” The proclamation provided such a plan. But he assured Congress that he was flexible. “Saying that, on certain terms, certain classes will be pardoned, with rights restored, it is not said that other classes, or other terms, will never be included. Saying that reconstruction will be accepted if presented in a specified way, it is not said it will never be accepted in any other way.” This acknowledgment that the plan was open to change indicated Lincoln’s willingness to have at least some blacks vote, even though his proposal enfranchised whites only. As he told Banks, the statement that other modes of Reconstruction were acceptable was added “on purpose that some conformity to circumstances should be admissible.”<sup>77</sup> Cautiously, Lincoln was laying the foundation for black voting rights.

The president acknowledged an obvious truth: that defeating the Confederacy still required military force. Rebels who wished to surrender would be more likely to step forward if they were secure from insurgent attacks. “Until that confidence shall be established, little can be done anywhere for what is called reconstruction.” In closing, he

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<sup>77</sup> Lincoln to Banks, Washington, 31 January 1864, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 7:162.

paid a handsome and eloquent tribute to Union soldiers and sailors: “our chiefest care must still be directed to the army and navy, who have thus far borne their harder part so nobly and well. And it may be esteemed fortunate that in giving the greatest efficiency to these indispensable arms, we do also honorably recognize the gallant men, from commander to sentinel, who compose them, and to whom, more than to others, the world must stand indebted for the home of freedom disenthralled, regenerated, enlarged, and perpetuated.”

To justify his plan, Lincoln cited the provision of the Constitution authorizing the chief executive “to grant reprieves and pardons for offences against the United States.” He also cited the Second Confiscation Act, which stipulated that the president could “extend to persons who may have participated in the existing rebellion, in any State of party thereof, pardon and amnesty.”<sup>78</sup> Lincoln’s reliance on the pardoning power was strained, for the framers of the Constitution clearly meant it to apply to individual cases, not whole classes of people.

In tightening his grip on the reins of Reconstruction, Lincoln felt strengthened by military victories in the summer and fall as well as by the Supreme Court decision in the Prize Cases, handed down in March 1863, upholding the legality of his action during the opening weeks of the war. But he did not ignore Congress. Repeatedly he acknowledged that only the House and Senate could determine whether to seat members from the Confederate states.

Congress was at first enthusiastic about Lincoln’s plan. Members of both houses as well as other politicians considered his message “the best document yet produced by

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<sup>78</sup> Annual Message to Congress, 8 December 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 7:50-53.



him.”<sup>79</sup> Noah Brooks reported that it was “received with a general expression of satisfaction and relief, as indicating the most feasible method of settling reconstruction.” The message, according to Brooks, “gives, probably, more general satisfaction than any Message since the days of Washington.”<sup>80</sup> William Dennison, former governor of Ohio and future postmaster general in Lincoln’s cabinet, lauded “the excellence and timeliness” of both the message and the proclamation.<sup>81</sup>

For the time being, Lincoln had managed to accommodate all factions.<sup>82</sup> Brooks noted that Lincoln “has pleased the radicals and satisfied the conservatives by plainly projecting a plan of reconstruction, which is just alike to popular rights, to the cause of liberty and to the loyal people of all sections of the Union.”<sup>83</sup> The leading Senate Radical, Charles Sumner, told a reporter that the proclamation and the message “fully and perfectly satisfied” him and noted with satisfaction that the “language of the proclamation and of the accompanying message plainly assumes that the rebel States have lost their original character as States of the Union.”<sup>84</sup> The Massachusetts senator cited Lincoln’s use of the term “reestablish” to prove his point: “We do not reestablish a government which continues to exist.”<sup>85</sup> The conservative New York Herald shrewdly remarked that

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<sup>79</sup> Washington correspondence, 10 December, Cincinnati Commercial, 11 December 1863.

<sup>80</sup> Washington correspondence, 12 December 1863, Sacramento Daily Union, 18 January 1864, in Michael Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed: Civil War Dispatches of Noah Brooks (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 94-95; Noah Brooks to George Witherle, Washington, 23 December 1863, ibid., 97.

<sup>81</sup> William Dennison to Lincoln, Columbus, 10 December 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>82</sup> Washington correspondence by Van [D. W. Bartlett], 30 December 1863, Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 1 January 1864.

<sup>83</sup> Washington correspondence, 12 December 1863, Sacramento Daily Union, 18 January 1864, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 94.

<sup>84</sup> Chicago Tribune, 14 and 30 December 1863.

<sup>85</sup> Congressional Globe, 38<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session, 289 (13 June 1864).

the “art of riding two horses is not confined to the circus.” The president “has for some time been riding two political horses, and with the skill of an old campaigner, he whips them – the radical horse ‘a leetle ahead’ – through his message.” Throughout his administration so far, “he has given us some marvellous surprises in bringing forward the radical horse in front when it was supposed he had been hopelessly dropped behind.”<sup>86</sup> Another conservative journal, the Washington National Intelligencer, was unusually generous in its praise.<sup>87</sup>

After observing the reaction on Capitol Hill, John Hay wrote in his diary: “I never have seen such an effect produced by a public document. Men acted as if the Millennium had come.” Senate Radicals were quite “delighted” and “beaming.” Henry Wilson told Hay: “The President has struck another great blow. Tell him from me God Bless him.” Senate Conservatives like Reverdy Johnson and James Dixon also “said it was highly satisfactory.” In the lower chamber the response was similar. George Boutwell called it “a very able and shrewd paper. It has great points of popularity: & it is right.” Owen Lovejoy “said it was glorious” and declared: “I shall live to see slavery ended in America.” James A. Garfield quietly remarked that the president “has struck a great blow for the country and himself.” Michigan Congressman Francis W. Kellogg gushed: “The President is the only man. He is the great man of the century. There is none like him in the world,” for “he sees more widely and more clearly than anybody.” Representative Henry T. Blow of Missouri told Hay: “God Bless Old Abe. I am one of the Radicals who

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<sup>86</sup> New York Herald, 11 December 1863.

<sup>87</sup> Washington correspondence by D. W. Bartlett, 28 November, New York Independent, 3 December 1863.

have always believed in the President.”<sup>88</sup> Iowa Senator James Grimes objected only to the implication that the Supreme Court might overrule the Emancipation Proclamation.

The public, happy with the recent victories at Chattanooga and Knoxville as well as the triumphs of July, was also enthusiastic. “It only needed this message to clinch and rivet the wide-spread and daily growing popularity of Mr. Lincoln,” observed John W. Forney. “That he has a hold on the popular heart stronger than that of any living American, has been made clear by a thousand evidences.”<sup>89</sup> Samuel Galloway reported to Lincoln that his message and proclamation “have strengthened public confidence in you in Ohio – and have rendered any competition for the next Presidential term utterly hopeless and forlorn– It is the best document you have written, always excepting your letter on military arrests to the Albany Committee.”<sup>90</sup> George Templeton Strong, who recorded that the message “finds very general favor,” thought that “Uncle Abe is the most popular man in America today. The firmness, honesty, and sagacity of the ‘gorilla despot’ may be recognized by the rebels themselves sooner than we expect, and the weight of his personal character may do a great deal toward restoration of our national unity.”<sup>91</sup> Charles Eliot Norton was also struck by the importance of Lincoln’s character: “Once more we may rejoice that Abraham Lincoln is President. How wise and how admirably timed is his Proclamation. As a state paper its naiveté is a wonder. Lincoln will introduce a new style into state papers; he will make them sincere, and his honesty will compel even politicians to like virtue. I conceive his character to be on the whole the

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<sup>88</sup> Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 121-22 (entry for 9 December 1863).

<sup>89</sup> Washington correspondence by “Occasional” (John W. Forney), 9 December, Philadelphia Press, 10 December 1863.

<sup>90</sup> Samuel Galloway to Lincoln, Columbus, 19 December 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>91</sup> Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey, eds., The Diary of George Templeton Strong (4 vols.; New York: Macmillan, 1952), 3:379 (entry for 11 December 1863).

great net gain from the war.”<sup>92</sup> Harriet Beecher Stowe described Lincoln’s messages as more like “a father’s talks to his children than a state-paper. And they have had that relish and smack of the soil, that appeal to the simple human heart and head, which is a greater power in writing than the most artful devices of rhetoric.”<sup>93</sup> A master of such rhetorical devices, Edward Everett, called Lincoln’s message a “very remarkable document; better written than usual & calculated to produce a great effect abroad.”<sup>94</sup>

Not everyone shared Everett’s positive view of the message’s style. A journalist deemed it “short, sharp, and decisive as a State paper, crude and angular as a literary effort.”<sup>95</sup> Some thought the stiff opening section, dealing with foreign relations, had been penned by Seward, whose assistance had in fact been necessitated by Lincoln’s illness.

Radicals in general were pleased because Lincoln agreed with their fundamental demand: the Union must be restored without slavery. “Stock in Father Abraham has evidently improved greatly since his message & proclamation of amnesty,” observed Republican Congressman Charles Upson of Michigan, who said he was “satisfied with any plan of Reconstruction which essentially destroys slavery. We want the snake killed this time, not ‘scotched’ merely.” Upson remarked that “‘Old Abe’ never goes back and though sometimes he has been thought slow in his movements he carries the country along with him on the whole pretty successfully.”<sup>96</sup> They might differ with the president – and among themselves – about other matters, but not that. “Let slavery be destroyed

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<sup>92</sup> Norton to G. W. Curtis, Shady Hill, 10 December 1863, Sara Norton and M. A. De Wolfe Howe, eds., Letters of Charles Eliot Norton (2 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), 1:266.

<sup>93</sup> Little’s Living Age, 6 February 1864.

<sup>94</sup> Everett diary, 10 December 1863, Everett Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>95</sup> Washington correspondence, 10 December, Cincinnati Commercial, 11 December 1863.

<sup>96</sup> Charles Upson to Austin Blair, Washington, 4 January 1864 [misdated 1863], 9 December 1863, Blair Papers, Detroit Public Library.

and other things will give but transitory difficulty,” said the Chicago Tribune.<sup>97</sup> The Radical Boston Commonwealth rejoiced that “the President’s plan ignores completely the present political existence of the rebel States, and subverts all their constitutions and their regulations as to suffrage, boundaries, and everything else, where subversion is necessary or important to secure the main object constantly held in view.” The Commonwealth applauded what it called Lincoln’s “conversion to the radical programme,” pointing out that he had rejected the central tenet of the Conservatives’ argument by insisting on emancipation as a prerequisite for restoration: “the President has fully made up his mind that as far as he is concerned, during his occupancy of the Presidential chair, be the term longer or shorter, no rebel State shall be again received into the Union as a slave State, or with slavery existing as a political and social element.” The editor argued that if “the Federal Government assumes the right to prescribe, by one jot or tittle, the conditions of re-admission, the exercise of that right is fatal to the whole conservative theory.”<sup>98</sup> In praising Lincoln’s two “great state papers,” the New York Independent echoed those sentiments: “We are all stronger to-day, and happier, because the President has again solemnly said that the Nation’s Word must be kept, and that those set free shall not be abandoned again to bondage.”<sup>99</sup>

Months later Radicals would change their tune.<sup>100</sup>

To avoid irritating the Radicals, Lincoln omitted from his final draft a discussion of the abstract question of whether the Confederate states were in or out of the Union, a

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<sup>97</sup> Chicago Tribune, 14 December 1863.

<sup>98</sup> Boston Commonwealth, 18 and 11 December 1863.

<sup>99</sup> New York Independent, 17 December 1863.

<sup>100</sup> Belz, Reconstructing the Union, 166.

matter that Radicals considered vital. In his original draft, Lincoln said that the question “seems to me, in every present aspect, to be of no practical importance. They all have been States in the Union; and all are to be hereafter, as we all propose; and a controversy whether they have ever been out of it, might divide and weaken, but could not enhance our strength, in restoring the proper national and State relations.” The president struck out this passage because he believed that the clause of the Constitution guaranteeing each state a republican form of government authorized him “to grant protection to states in the Union and it will not do ever to admit that these states have at any time be[en] out.”<sup>101</sup>

The issue of black suffrage, which eventually would prove so contentious, barely arose in 1863. Chase suggested to Lincoln that the word “voters” in the proclamation be changed to “citizens,” thus enfranchising blacks in the reconstructed states. (Attorney General Bates had recently determined that blacks were citizens, the Dred Scott decision to the contrary notwithstanding.) When Secretary of the Interior Usher remarked that “Chase was very pertinacious about the word citizen instead of voters,” Lincoln heatedly replied: “Yes, Chase thinks the negroes, as citizens, will vote to make him President.” Usher cited this as an “event showing Lincoln’s temper.”<sup>102</sup> Chase’s was a lonely voice, for other Radical spokesmen and journals were then avoiding the question of black voting rights. Since no other cabinet member supported the treasury secretary’s position, he did not press it, saying “that he was in the main so well satisfied with it [the proclamation] that he would take no exception to it.”<sup>103</sup> Another source of future conflict between the

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<sup>101</sup> Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 125 (entry for 10 December 1863).

<sup>102</sup> Usher’s recollections in Humorous and Pathetic Stories of Abraham Lincoln (5<sup>th</sup> ed., 2<sup>nd</sup> series; Fort Wayne: Lincoln Publishing Co., 1900?), 16.

<sup>103</sup> John P. Usher to Richard W. Thompson, Washington, 14 August 1864, R. W. Thompson Papers, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana; Chase to Lincoln, Washington, 12 April 1865, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

president and Congress, the ten per cent provision, received little criticism at first.

Lincoln chose that modest figure evidently based on the earlier response of voters in Tennessee, Arkansas, and Louisiana.<sup>104</sup>

While Radicals seemed satisfied, Republican Conservatives like Montgomery Blair, Gideon Welles, Henry J. Raymond, and Orville H. Browning objected to making emancipation a requirement for reconstruction. Most Conservatives, however, appreciated the conciliatory spirit of Lincoln's message as well as his willingness to leave the states and their governments intact (except for slavery) and to let Southern whites determine how the blacks were to be treated. They also liked his acknowledgement that Congress and the Supreme Court might alter the plan.<sup>105</sup>

To avoid an unfavorable court ruling, Lincoln could have taken the advice of Isaac N. Arnold and Leonard Swett to recommend a constitutional amendment abolishing slavery, but he feared that doing so in would be premature.<sup>106</sup> Nonetheless, in October 1863 he told Swett that he knew the time for such an amendment was fast approaching: "I can see emancipation coming; whoever can wait for it will also see it; whoever gets in the way of it will be run over by it."<sup>107</sup> In addition, he doubtless assumed that a Radical would introduce such a measure into Congress sooner or later.<sup>108</sup> To a Louisiana Conservative, Lincoln explained that he did not regard his plan "as a Procrustean bed, to which exact conformity is to be indispensable; and in Louisiana particularly, I wish that

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<sup>104</sup> Belz, Reconstructing the Union, 165.

<sup>105</sup> Belz, Reconstructing the Union, 160-61.

<sup>106</sup> Arnold to Lincoln, Washington, 4 December 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>107</sup> Speech by Swett, 22 October 1887, Chicago Times, 23 October 1887.

<sup>108</sup> Michael Vorenberg, Final Freedom: The Civil War, the Abolition of Slavery, and the Thirteenth Amendment (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 46-48.

labor already done, which varies from that plan in no important particular, may not be thrown away.”<sup>109</sup>

Moderates lauded the president’s plan as “simple and yet perfectly effective” as well as “inevitable.”<sup>110</sup> They found especially noteworthy its rejection of the state suicide doctrine while insisting that slavery be abolished.<sup>111</sup>

Some Ultra-

Radicals denounced the amnesty plan as “all wrong,” and a “great error” rooted in “dangerous conservatism.”<sup>112</sup> But William Cullen Bryant spoke for most vigorous opponents of slavery when he praised Lincoln’s generosity: “Nothing, it must be admitted, could be more magnanimous or lenient toward the Rebels; they have put themselves beyond the pale of the law by their insanity; their properties are already declared confiscated, and their lives are in jeopardy; and, if they continue contumacious, the whole of their beautiful region they inhabit will be inevitably overrun by our armies, their fields laid waste, their cities and towns desolated, and their homes pillaged. But in this dire strait the President offers them not only a peace, which shall save them from the miseries of war, but an honorable pardon which shall imbue them with all the attributes of the citizen. The very condition, moreover, on which they are asked to accept these boons, is a beneficent one – the renunciation of that monstrous idol of Slavery, which has been the source of all their sacrifices and sufferings and woes.”<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Lincoln to Thomas Cottman, Washington, 15 December 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 7:66.

<sup>110</sup> [New York Times, 11 December 1863; Harpers Weekly, 19 December 1863.](#)

<sup>111</sup> Belz, Reconstructing the Union, 172.

<sup>112</sup> The Rev. Mr. John G. Fee to Wendell Phillips, Liberator, 18 March 1864; Whitelaw Reid to Anna E. Dickinson, 3 April 1864, Dickinson Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>113</sup> New York Evening Post, 10, 15 December 1863.



Some Southerners agreed. The Nashville Daily Press, a conservative paper, predicted that Lincoln’s plan would appeal to a large majority of Tennessee voters, for it would relieve them of military government.<sup>114</sup>

Democrats were less supportive, arguing that the “simply absurd” ten percent plan amounted to minority rule.<sup>115</sup> “When this proposition is accepted,” said the Cincinnati Enquirer, “we had better burn up all the copies of the Declaration of Independence, for they will remind us of our apostasy and shame, and openly admit that our political system is a Despotism pure and simple – as much so as Russia or Austria.” The Enquirer fumed that Lincoln’s plan was “as crude and unconstitutional as it is impolitic,” for it was essentially an attempt to impose “upon the Union men of the South the Emancipation Proclamation as a test.”<sup>116</sup> In Iowa, a Democratic journal derided the “absurd” amnesty offer and sniffed that “no people alive to self-respect” could accept it. If they did so, they would deserve “not only to lose the slaves they have but to become bound to them in the bonds of the most galling servitude.”<sup>117</sup> Democrats also alleged that Lincoln’s Ten Per Cent Plan aimed to restore Southern states in such a way that they would vote Republican in 1864.<sup>118</sup>

Congress’s legislative response to Lincoln’s plan was at first positive. Among the many bills introduced during the early weeks of session, the most important was offered by Representative James M. Ashley, a Radical from Ohio. It contained most of the

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<sup>114</sup> New York Tribune, 30 December 1863.

<sup>115</sup> New York World, 10 December 1863.

<sup>116</sup> Charles Ray Wilson, “The Cincinnati Daily Enquirer and Civil War Politics: A Study of Copperhead Opinion” (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1934), 245-246.

<sup>117</sup> Dubuque Herald, 20 December 1863, in Hubert H. Wubben, Civil War Iowa and the Copperhead Movement (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1980), 107.

<sup>118</sup> Washington correspondence, 10 December, Cincinnati Commercial, 14 December 1863.

president's suggestions – including the loyalty oath, the ten percent formula, the requirement that state constitutions abolish slavery, and the use of military governors – but stipulated that suffrage would be granted to loyal males (which would include blacks) but denied to Rebel officials and soldiers. Abandoning his earlier championship of the state suicide theory, Ashley grounded his proposal on the Constitution's guarantee that all states would have a republican form of government. In most regards (except for the suffrage qualifications), his bill appeared to be a detailed implementation of the framework Lincoln suggested. So it seemed to many at the time, including the editors of the New York Evening Post and New York Times. Ashley's bill was referred to a special committee on Reconstruction, established in response to the president's message. In moving the creation of such a committee, Thaddeus Stevens was not declaring war on Lincoln's plan but merely carrying out a routine procedure followed by the House for decades. The committee would eventually become an enemy of the administration, but it was not so conceived.

The executive-legislative honeymoon was short lived, for Radicals quickly grew disenchanted with Lincoln's approach to Reconstruction. Even on December 9, the Chicago Tribune reported that "as they began to scan it more closely," Radicals "became more cautious in their praise." The "intense radicals" argued "that it owes its apparent popularity to its avoidance of points on which he knew that anything he would say would arouse differences among his supporters."<sup>119</sup> Maine Senator William Pitt Fessenden called the amnesty proclamation "silly" because it told "the rebels they may fight as long

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<sup>119</sup> Washington correspondence, 9 December, Chicago Tribune, 10 December 1863.

as they can, and take a pardon when they have had enough of it.”<sup>120</sup> Henry Winter Davis agreed, but he and Fessenden were in a distinct minority, at least in December 1863.<sup>121</sup>

Some Radicals not in Congress also expressed disappointment. Maintaining that the “Administration has put the negro, his liberty, his future, into the hands of the Supreme Court,” Benjamin Butler exclaimed: “God help him if he has no other refuge!” To Wendell Phillips, the general complained that “no one seems to see the point.”<sup>122</sup> Phillips, however, did. He lamented to Butler that the president’s scheme “leaves the large landed proprietors of the South still to domineer over its politics, and make the negro’s freedom a mere sham. Until a large share of those estates are divided, the aristocracy is not destroyed, neither is any fair chance given for the development of a system of free labor.”<sup>123</sup> To an audience at New York’s Cooper Union, Phillips denounced Lincoln’s proposal as “neither wise, safe, nor feasible.” The country “owes to the negro, not merely freedom, but land and education.” Passionately he urged the president to ask Congress for a constitutional amendment abolishing slavery everywhere.<sup>124</sup>

Frederick Douglass was equally impatient with Lincoln, who he said “has virtually laid down this as the rule of his statesmen: Do evil by choice, right from necessity.” The Ten Per Cent plan, Douglass exclaimed, was “an entire contradiction of

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<sup>120</sup> Francis Fessenden, Life and Public Services of William Pitt Fessenden (2 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1907), 1:266-267.

<sup>121</sup> Gerald S. Henig, Henry Winter Davis: Antebellum and Civil War Congressman from Maryland (New York: Twayne, 1973), 192-93.

<sup>122</sup> Blanche Butler Ames, ed., Private and Official Correspondence of Gen. Benjamin F. Butler, During the Period of the Civil War (5 vols.; Norwood, Massachusetts: Plimpton Press, 1917), 3:204.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:207.

<sup>124</sup> Oscar Sherwin, Prophet of Liberty: The Life and Times of Wendell Phillips (New York: Bookman Associates, 1958), 486.

the constitutional idea of the Republican government.” By failing to support black suffrage, Lincoln betrayed black soldiers. “Our Government asks the Negro to espouse its cause; it asks him to turn against his master, and thus fires his master’s hate against him. Well, when it has attained peace, what does it propose? Why this, to hand the Negro back to the political power of his master, without a single element of strength to shield himself from the vindictive spirit sure to be roused against the whole colored race.”<sup>125</sup>

#### IMPLEMENTING THE TEN PERCENT PLAN: FLORIDA AND LOUISIANA

The implementation of Lincoln’s plan got off to a rocky start. In January 1864, to help bring Florida back into the Union, Lincoln dispatched John Hay with instructions to enroll enough voters to meet the ten per cent threshold established in the Reconstruction Proclamation. Some Republicans thought the assistant private secretary too youthful and flippant for such a responsible task. An Ohio journalist described him as “that fellow five feet tall, that walks like lightning down the street” wearing “a turtle-backed hat, just the shape of his cranium, with well oiled locks, and handsome kid gloves.” A “stranger might mistake him for a stray Englishman,” and a “close observer will notice at once the air of weighty secrets by which he is surrounded.” Hay expressed himself “in the choice and expressive language which prevails at the ‘Chebang,’ as he pleasantly terms the White House. Inquire affectionately after the health of the President of the mightiest nation on the earth, and John will inform you that the ‘old Tycoon is in high feather.’”<sup>126</sup> A Philadelphia editor thought Hay’s “young, almost beardless, and almost boyish

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<sup>125</sup> Douglass to an English correspondent, [July 1864], The Liberator (Boston), 16 September 1864.

<sup>126</sup> Washington correspondence by “Norman,” 31 December 1863, Ohio State Journal (Columbus), 2 January 1864.

countenance did not seem to match with official responsibilities and the tumult of action in time of pressure.”<sup>127</sup>

Union military authorities in Florida had been planning a campaign in the northeast portion of the state in order to cut off the peninsula from the rest of the Confederacy. In January 1864, after authorizing General Quincy A. Gillmore to launch that offensive, Lincoln had Hay commissioned as a major and sent him to join it. At first, Hay expressed optimism about his mission. “I think we will soon have the state back in the Union,” he wrote on February 8. “If we get the ‘President's Tithe’ it will be fully half the voters in the state, as the poor old carcass of a neighborhood has been plucked to the bone, by North & South.”<sup>128</sup> To Lincoln, he described the residents as “ignorant and apathetic,” seeming “to know nothing and care nothing about the matter.” They vaguely objected “to being shot and having their houses burned,” but they do not understand “why it is done” and “will be very glad to see a government strong enough to protect them against these everyday incidents of the last two years.” Hay received “the best assurances that we will get the tenth required: although so large a portion of the rebel population is in the army & so many of the loyal people, refugees in the North, that the state is well-nigh depopulated. We will have almost a clean slate to begin with.”<sup>129</sup>

A week later, however, Hay predicted that he would fail.<sup>130</sup> On February 20, Gillmore’s offensive was repulsed at the battle of Olustee, making that prediction a

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<sup>127</sup> John Russell Young quoted in T. C. Evans, “Personal Reminiscences of John Hay,” Chattanooga, Tennessee, Sunday Times, 30 July 1905.

<sup>128</sup> Hay to Nicolay, at sea off the coast of Florida, 8 February 1864, in Michael Burlingame ed., At Lincoln's Side: John Hay's Civil War Correspondence and Selected Writings (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 74-75.

<sup>129</sup> Hay to Lincoln, mouth of the St. John’s River, 8 February 1864, in Burlingame ed., At Lincoln's Side, 75-76.

<sup>130</sup> Lyman D. Stickney to Chase, St. Augustine, 26 February 1864, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

certainty. A Union officer, Joseph R. Hawley of Connecticut, called the attempt to restore Florida “a gigantic humbug. Besides the Floridians who were already with the Union forces at St. Augustine, Fernandina, Key West, etc., we have scarcely met a man who would be allowed to vote in Connecticut, – that is with sufficient intelligence and education. Not enough white men have we picked up to make one good country school district at the north. We have some prisoners, a good many deserters and a lot of stragglers, poor white-livered, fever-stricken, scrawny, ignorant creatures, with hardly intelligence enough to be made even the tool of a political intriguer.”<sup>131</sup> Hay himself acknowledged the truth of Hawley’s observation, explaining that “we must wait for further developments in military operations before we can hope for a reorganization of the state under a loyal government. I find nearly everybody willing to take the oath of allegiance prescribed by the President, but I find scarcely anyone left in the country. Whole counties seem almost thoroughly depopulated. The few that remain seem heartily tired of the war, and willing to swear allegiance in any terms to the power that will protect them, but there are really not enough, as it seems to me, to justify a movement just at present, for rehabilitation.”<sup>132</sup>

The New York Herald also regarded Hay’s mission as a humbug. That paper, which was championing the presidential candidacy of Grant, reported rumors “that the expedition was intended simply for the occupation of Florida for the purpose of securing the election of three Lincoln delegates to the National Nominating Convention, and that of John Hay to Congress. The cost of the operation to the government is estimated at

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<sup>131</sup> Hawley to Charles Dudley Warner, Jacksonville, Florida, 4 March 1864, Arthur L. Shipman, “Letters of Joseph R. Hawley,” typescript dated 1929, 199, Connecticut Historical Society.

<sup>132</sup> Nicolay to N. P. Banks, Key West, 7 March 1864, in Burlingame ed., At Lincoln's Side, 78-79.

about one million of dollars.”<sup>133</sup> Hay “greatly excited at the notice taken of his Florida mission by the Herald,” penned a response for the Washington National Republican asserting that the military offensive was planned and approved before he was given his assignment, which he had applied for because he desired “a more active life.”<sup>134</sup>

Criticism of the administration’s Ten Percent plan grew more intense after Lincoln altered his policy in Louisiana. Frustrated by the endless delays in setting up a new government there -- caused in part by the legalistic approach of Thomas J. Durant -- he decided to stop relying on the Free State Committee and to count instead on N. P. Banks to get things moving. Thus he abandoned his earlier insistence that the formation of new state governments should “be a movement of the people of the Districts, and not a movement of our military and quasi-military, authorities there.”

Banks had a plan that strongly appealed to Lincoln. The “only speedy and certain method of accomplishing your object,” Banks told the president, would be to order an election “of a State Government, under the Constitution [of 1852] and Laws of Louisiana, except so much thereof as recognized and relates to slavery, which should be declared by the authority calling the election, and in the order authorizing it, inoperative and void.” Within two months, voters could be registered in the manner that Lincoln had spelled out in his proclamation and an election could be held. Soon thereafter a convention to revise the 1852 constitution could be summoned. “The People of Louisiana will accept such a proposition with favor,” Banks predicted, for they “will prefer it to any arrangement which leaves the subject to them for an affirmative or negative vote. Strange as this may

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<sup>133</sup> New York Herald, 23 February 1864.

<sup>134</sup> Lyman D. Stickney to Chase, St. Augustine, 2 March 1864, Chase Papers, Library of Congress; Washington National Republican, n.d., copied in the New York Times, 7 March 1864.

appear, it is the fact. Of course a government organized upon the basis of immediate and universal freedom, with the general consent of the people, followed by the adaptation of commercial and industrial interests to this order of things, & supported by the Army and Navy, the influence of the civil officers of the Government, and the Administration at Washington, could not fail by any possible chance, to obtain an absolute and permanent recognition of the principle of freedom upon which it would be based.” Such a strategy, Banks assured the president, “will be far more acceptable to the Citizens of Louisiana, than the submission of the question of slavery to the chances of an election. Their self-respect, their Amour propre will be appeased if they are not required to vote for or against it. Offer them a Government without slavery, and they will gladly accept it as a necessity resulting from the war. On all other points, sufficient guarantees of right results can be secured: but the great question, that of immediate emancipation, will be covered, ab initis by a conceded and absolute prohibition of slavery.” Banks explained that he was “opposed to any settlement, and have been from the beginning, except upon the basis of immediate emancipation, but it is better to secure it by consent, than by force, better still by consent and force. It carries moral, as well as physical power with it.” Consideration of black suffrage could be postponed a year or more: “Other questions relating to the condition of the negro, may safely be deferred until this one is secured. If he gains freedom, education, the right to bear arms, the highest privileges accorded to any race and which none has yet proved itself worthy unless it be our own, his best friend may rest content for another year at least.”<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Banks to Lincoln, New Orleans, 30 December 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. Banks had drafted a similar proposal two months earlier. Banks to Lincoln, New Orleans, 23 October 1863, draft “finished but not sent,” Banks Papers, Library of Congress.



It is not entirely clear if Lincoln knew the details of this plan before putting Banks in charge of Louisiana Reconstruction. The general had evidently written a letter, no longer extant, outlining his plans to George Boutwell, who read it to the president on December 21. Boutwell reported to Banks that the letter “made a deep impression upon the President and in no manner unfriendly to you. After some further consideration he said he should write to you saying that he understood and expected you to exercise supreme and undivided authority and to take the matter of State organization into your own hands.” Lincoln, wrote Boutwell, “is still anxious to have La. organized as a free State, and I believe he fully agreed with my suggestion that it could be well and speedily accomplished only by putting the power into your hands.”<sup>136</sup>

Delighted at the prospect of swift action, Lincoln on Christmas Eve 1863 wrote Banks endorsing his plan and authorizing him to carry it out. The president apologized for his sharp letter of December 6: “I deeply regret to have said or done anything which could give you pain, or uneasiness. I have all the while intended you to be master, as well in regard to re-organizing a State government for Louisiana, as in regard to the military matters of the Department; and hence my letters on reconstruction have nearly if not quite all been addressed to you. My error has been that it did not occur to me that Gov. Shepley or any one else would set up a claim to act independently of you; and hence I said nothing expressly upon the point. Language has not been guarded at a point where no danger was thought of. I now tell you that in every dispute, with whomsoever, you are master. Gov. Shepley was appointed to assist the Commander of the Department, and not to thwart him, or act independently of him. Instructions have been given directly to him,

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<sup>136</sup> Boutwell to Banks, Washington, 21 December 1863, Banks Papers, Library of Congress; Boutwell to Banks, Washington, 11 January 1864, W. P. Palmer Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society; Cox, Lincoln and Black Freedom, 66-70.

merely to spare you detail labor, and not to supersede your authority. This, in its liability to be misconstrued, it now seems was an error in us. But it is past. I now distinctly tell you that you are master of all, and that I wish you to take the case as you find it, and give us a free-state re-organization of Louisiana, in the shortest possible time. What I say here is to have a reasonable construction. I do not mean that you are to withdraw from Texas, or abandon any other military measure which you may deem important. Nor do I mean that you are to throw away available work already done for re-construction; or that war is to be made upon Gov. Shepley, or upon any one else, unless it be found that they will not co-operate with you, in which case, and in all cases, you are master while you remain in command of the Department.”<sup>137</sup>

Banks’ “confidence in the practicability of constructing a free state-government, speedily, for Louisiana,” and his “zeal to accomplish it” gratified Lincoln, who urged the general to “proceed with all possible dispatch.” To assist Banks, Lincoln let it be known that all federal appointees in Louisiana should give the general “full, and zealous co-operation.”<sup>138</sup> Lincoln’s fateful decision to place Banks in charge would profoundly affect the course of reconstruction not only in Louisiana but also throughout the South.

True to his word, Banks delivered a free state government in less than two months. Emboldened by his new authority, he scrapped the Free State Committee’s plan to hold a constitutional convention and mandated that on February 22 elections be held for governor and other state officials, based on the 1852 state constitution. To nullify provisions of that document sanctioning slavery, the general promulgated special orders. Michael Hahn, a Moderate, won the governorship, defeating the Radical Benjamin

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<sup>137</sup> Lincoln to Banks, Washington, 24 December 1864, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 7:89-90.

<sup>138</sup> Lincoln to Banks, Washington, 13 January 1864, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 7:123-24.

Flanders and the Conservative J. Q. A. Fellows. The turnout of more than 11,000 voters far exceeded the ten per cent requirement. Lincoln congratulated Hahn for “having fixed your name in history as the first-free-state Governor of Louisiana.”<sup>139</sup> Five weeks later, 6,000 voters participated in the election of delegates to a constitutional convention, which met from April through July. In September, the resulting document won ratification by a handsome majority (6,836 to 1,566).

Lincoln and Banks had transformed the sputtering reconstruction efforts of the Free State Committee and General Shepley into a successful movement restoring the Bayou State on the basis of liberty. By all rights, the Radicals should have been pleased, but they were not.

As 1864 began, a journalist rashly predicted that since “the republican party is a unit,” therefore “no quarrels between radicals and conservatives will be in order.”<sup>140</sup> In fact, a quarrel soon broke out over Louisiana Reconstruction as Congress refused to seat Representatives and Senators from the Bayou State.

The man most responsible for creating this serious rupture in the Republican coalition was forty-six-year-old Thomas J. Durant, the tall, emaciated, dyspeptic head of Louisiana’s Free State Committee. A follower of the French utopian socialist philosopher Francois Marie Charles Fourier, and an admirer of Thomas Jefferson (after whom he was named), Durant had campaigned for Stephen A. Douglas in 1860 and served briefly in the Confederate militia. Though he owned a few slaves and early in the war had defended planters complaining about Union troops’ practice of harboring runaways, by 1863 he had become an ardent leader of the antislavery forces in New Orleans. In 1862, Durant,

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<sup>139</sup> Lincoln to Hahn, Washington, 13 March 1864, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 7:243.

<sup>140</sup> Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, weekly ed., 2 January 1864.

who eventually was to pick a fight with Lincoln and Banks over black suffrage, had formulated a Reconstruction plan based on white voters alone. As state attorney general and commissioner of voter registration, he had refused to enroll free blacks.<sup>141</sup>

Lincoln, on the other hand, had twice approved the enfranchisement of free blacks by February 1864, when Durant began his revolt against the president's reconstruction policy. In August 1863, Stanton had directed Governor Shepley to register for voting "all the loyal citizens of the United States." The word white, which Durant had used in defining those eligible to vote, was conspicuously absent. In early December, Durant abruptly changed course and recommended that freeborn black males be enfranchised.<sup>142</sup>

Chase told Durant that the administration meant to allow, but not insist upon, the enfranchisement of freeborn blacks.<sup>143</sup> "I am particularly gratified," wrote the treasury secretary, "by your wise and courageous advocacy of the right of native freeborn colored citizens to participate in the reorganization of the State Governments. I informed the President of your views on this subject, and he said he could see no objection to the registering of such citizens, or to their exercise of the right of suffrage. You will have observed doubtless that in his Message and Proclamation he does not limit reorganization to the precise forms or modes proposed by him, but is willing to accept any form or mode whereby the great ends of restoration to the Union with permanent free State institutions can be best secured."<sup>144</sup> To Lyman D. Stickney, a friend acting as tax commissioner in Florida, where Reconstruction efforts were also underway, Chase praised Durant's action

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<sup>141</sup> Joseph G. Tregle, Jr., "Thomas J. Durant, Utopian Socialism, and the Failure of Presidential Reconstruction in Louisiana," Journal of Southern History 45 (1979): 485-512.

<sup>142</sup> Durant to Chase, New Orleans, 4 December 1863, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>143</sup> Cox, Lincoln and Black Freedom, 77-78.

<sup>144</sup> Chase to Durant, Washington, 28 December 1863, Niven, ed., Chase Papers, 4:230.

regarding free-born blacks and added: “I told the President of it, and he said he could see no objection to their enrollment and voting.” Chase urged Stickney and others working to restore the government of Florida to “go further, and let all of full age vote who have borne arms for the country, or who can read and write, without any other distinctions at present.”<sup>145</sup> When Lincoln received an appeal from a white Louisiana Unionist urging him to deny blacks the right to vote for constitutional convention delegates, he endorsed it as follows: “On very full consideration I do not wish to say more than I have publicly said.”<sup>146</sup> Just as he would not openly support black voting yet, he would not oppose it either.

If Lincoln meant to suggest subtly to Banks that he would be willing to have blacks vote in Louisiana, the general failed to take the hint; he allowed only whites to cast ballots in the February 1864 election. Revealingly, Durant raised no objection, though he was enraged by Lincoln’s decision to name Banks “master of all.” In an access of injured self-esteem, Durant became an implacable and highly effective foe of Lincoln’s plan. If Banks had handled Durant with more tact, Lincoln’s Reconstruction policy might have worked. As it was, the general hurt Durant’s feelings by reading him Lincoln’s letter making him “master of all.” The “word MASTER . . . grated harshly upon my ears,” Durant told Chase. “I was deeply mortified.”<sup>147</sup> Further antagonizing the Free State Committeemen, Banks scuttled their effort to hold a constitutional convention before the general election. Durant said that he would not oppose the general’s policy but would do nothing to further it. When Banks issued a call for elections to be held on

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<sup>145</sup> Chase to Lyman D. Stickney, Washington, 29 December 1863, in Cox, Lincoln and Black Freedom, 80.

<sup>146</sup> Lincoln’s December 16 endorsement on John L. Riddell to Lincoln, 15 December 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 7:71.

<sup>147</sup> Durant to Chase, New Orleans, 16 January 1864, Niven, ed., Chase Papers, 4:258.

February 22, Durant quit his posts as attorney general and commissioner of registration. Equally alienated was Benjamin F. Flanders, who wrote Chase from New Orleans that “Mr Lincoln has lost by his letter to Gen Banks much of the friendship which he previously enjoyed of loyal men here. He will find . . . that he has another Missouri case on his hands.”<sup>148</sup> The general further angered the Free State faction by renegeing on his agreement to hold elections for delegates to the constitutional convention simultaneously with the general election (February 22).<sup>149</sup> At the Free State nominating convention, the Durant-Flanders faction lost to more conservative Unionists, who nominated Michael Hahn for governor. Though he emphatically endorsed immediate emancipation, Hahn was suspect in the eyes of the Radicals, who regarded him as “a trickster and a trimming politician.” To challenge him they put Flanders forward.<sup>150</sup> (Conservatives like Thomas Cottman had decided not to contest the election.) During the brief campaign, Hahn’s supporters engaged in race baiting, which Banks failed to stop. Such tactics lent credence to the Radicals’ claim that they were the only true-blue antislavery faction. Durant openly charged that Banks had scrapped the original plan to hold a constitutional convention before the general election at the insistence of the Lincoln administration, which he said greatly dreaded the prospect of black suffrage. This charge was unfounded, as Durant knew from Chase’s letters. In fact, Flanders denied that black suffrage was an issue in the contest, though when challenged to state his position on the subject, he refused to oppose it. Privately he acknowledged that blacks “must at some time hereafter” be enfranchised, but in early 1864 he was “not ready for that question.” Hahn won, to the intense disgust

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<sup>148</sup> Flanders to Chase, New Orleans, 14 January 1864, Chase Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

<sup>149</sup> Cox, Lincoln and Black Freedom, 84-86.

<sup>150</sup> Cox, Lincoln and Black Freedom, 87.

of the Durant faction, which then refused to have anything to do with the subsequent election for delegates to the constitutional convention. They believed that Banks had rigged the election.<sup>151</sup> Their boycott drastically reduced the chances that the convention would enfranchise blacks.

To counter that development, Lincoln on March 13 injected himself into the contest on the side of black voting rights. Congratulating Hahn on his election, the president significantly alluded to the upcoming convention: “Now you are about to have a Convention which, among other things, will probably define the elective franchise. I barely suggest for your private consideration, whether some of the colored people may not be let in – as, for instance, the very intelligent, and especially those who have fought gallantly in our ranks. They would probably help, in some trying time to come, to keep the jewel of liberty within the family of freedom. But this is only a suggestion, not to the public, but to you alone.”<sup>152</sup> Though phrased tentatively, the president’s letter was really an order, similar to the August missive regarding emancipation that he sent to Banks, with copies to Free State Committee leaders.<sup>153</sup>

Lincoln’s instruction to Hahn may have been prompted by a delegation of New Orleans free blacks who the previous day had presented him with a petition, ignored by Shepley and Banks, bearing signatures of a thousand blacks asking to be enrolled as voters. Their leaders, Jean Baptiste Roudeanez and Arnold Bertonneau, explained that of the 30,000 free blacks in Louisiana, all but 1,000 were literate; that they paid taxes on property worth over \$15,000,000; that many were descended from French and Spanish

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<sup>151</sup> Flanders to Chase, New Orleans, 26 February 1864, Chase Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

<sup>152</sup> Lincoln to Hahn, Washington, 13 March 1864, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 7:243.

<sup>153</sup> Cox, Lincoln and Black Freedom, 94.

settlers and from men who had fought with Andrew Jackson at the epic battle with the British on January 8, 1815; that many had lighter complexions than some whites; and that they had rallied to protect the city from a feared attack by Confederates while Banks' men were besieging Port Hudson. "We are men; treat us as such," they argued.<sup>154</sup>

Lincoln's respectful treatment of his black visitors shocked the sensibilities of Southern whites who observed the interview. After reading their petition, he remarked: "I regret, gentlemen, that you are not able to secure all your rights, and that circumstances will not permit the government to confer them upon you. I wish you would amend your petition so as to include several suggestions, which I think will give more effect to your prayer, and after having done so please hand it to me." When a leader of the delegation volunteered to rewrite the document on the spot, Lincoln asked: "Are you, then, the author of this eloquent production?"

"Whether eloquent or not, it is my own work," he replied, and thereupon swiftly incorporated the president's suggestions into the petition.<sup>155</sup>

Though Lincoln was courteous and respectful to his black guests, and though they agreed to his suggested changes in their petition, he denied their request, explaining "that the restoration of the Union in all its parts being his primary aim, all other questions, in his mind, were subordinate to this. Hence, whatever he did to attain this end arose from his estimate of the political necessity demanding the action, and not from any moral aspects of the case. Inasmuch as the reasons given for admitting the free people of color to the voting privilege in Louisiana were purely of a moral nature, in no wise affecting

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<sup>154</sup> Petition dated 10 March 1864, The Liberator (Boston), 1 April 1864.

<sup>155</sup> Reminiscences of John W. Forney in a lecture delivered in November 1865 before the Ladies' Soldiers' Aid Society of Weldon, Pennsylvania, New York Evening Post, 30 November 1865.



the relation of that State to the Union, he would not depart from his established views, and would decline to take any steps in the matter until a political urgency rendered such a course proper.”<sup>156</sup> (According to another account of his remarks, Lincoln said that he “saw no reason why intelligent black men should not vote, but this was not a military question, and he would refer it to the constitutional convention in Louisiana.”)<sup>157</sup> This statement strikingly resembles Lincoln’s famous 1862 letter to Horace Greeley responding to “The Prayer of Twenty Millions.”

Lincoln’s support of black suffrage was more comprehensive than that of Radicals like Durant, who endorsed voting rights only for freeborn blacks. The president’s recommendation that some former slaves as well be allowed to vote if they had served in the army or were “very intelligent” closely resembled Chase’s stand on that issue. On December 28, the treasury secretary wrote Durant: “I hope your Convention will be wise enough to adopt the principle of universal suffrage of all men, unconvicted of crime, who can read and write, and have a fair knowledge of the Constitution of the State and of the United States. What a glory for Louisiana to be the first State to adopt a Constitution basing the right of suffrage on virtue and intelligence alone. The object might be easily attained by establishing commissions to make examinations, and give certificates for which a small fee, fifty cents or a dollar, might be required. These certificates would naturalize the recipients into the great electoral community.”<sup>158</sup> (The requirement that blacks pay a poll tax and interpret the state and national constitutions

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<sup>156</sup> Washington correspondence, 5 March, Ohio State Journal (Columbus), 9 March 1864.

<sup>157</sup> New York Evening Post, 4 March 1864.

<sup>158</sup> Cox, Lincoln and Black Freedom, 96.

would in later decades be used by Southern whites to strip blacks of voting rights granted them after the war.)

Thus in later 1863 and early 1864, Chase and Lincoln saw eye to eye on black suffrage. The treasury secretary had not objected to the voting provision in Lincoln's Amnesty and Reconstruction Proclamation. The president hesitated to endorse black suffrage so long as Louisiana officially remained a Slave State, but he made it clear that he would not object if white Louisianans enfranchised their black neighbors.

Acting on Lincoln's gently phrased letter, Governor Hahn threw his weight behind efforts to incorporate voting rights for at least some blacks in the new state constitution. Banks, evidently at Lincoln's urging, worked behind the scenes to obtain the same result. In April, when delegates met to draft a new constitution, the general maneuvered to prevent a Conservative from becoming chairman of the convention. Instead he helped get Edward H. Durrell, a New Orleans attorney, named to that post. Banks urged Durrell to have a provision adopted enfranchising some blacks, based on intellect or property ownership. He gave similar advice to another delegate, Thomas B. Thorpe. The majority of delegates, however, were unreceptive and went so far as to prohibit the legislature from ever granting blacks the right to vote. Banks and Hahn worked hard to reverse that decision. The final version of the document authorized the legislature to allow blacks to vote based on service in the army, intellectual merit, or payment of taxes. This did not satisfy Lincoln's desire for limited black suffrage, but it helped pave the way for such a reform. The constitution also provided for the education

of all children without distinction of race, allowed blacks to serve in the militia, and guaranteed equal rights in court.<sup>159</sup>

This was as much as whites in Louisiana would abide. Chase's main informant about Louisiana affairs, George S. Denison (Collector of the Port of New Orleans), told him that "constitutions & laws are without good effect, unless sustained by an enlightened public opinion – and any law giving suffrage to negroes, could not be so sustained at present, in any State county or town throughout the whole South. I do not think you appreciate or understand the intense antipathy with which Southerners regard negroes. It is the natural antipathy of races, developed & intensified by the servile, brutal condition of one – the insolent, despotic position of the other." Given those conditions, Denison asserted that the constitution's provision allowing the legislature to enfranchise blacks was "a great step in the right direction."<sup>160</sup>

Lincoln's March 13 letter to Hahn had smoothed the way for the adoption of that clause in the new constitution. The following year, Hahn said the president's missive "though marked 'private,' was no doubt intended to be seen by other Union men in Louisiana beside myself, and was consequently shown to many members of our Constitutional Convention and leading free-State men." He added that the "letter, written in the mild and graceful tone which imparted so much weight to Mr. Lincoln's simple suggestions, no doubt had great effect on the action of the Louisiana Convention in all matters appertaining to the colored man."<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Cox, Lincoln and Black Freedom, 98-99.

<sup>160</sup> George S. Denison to Chase, New Orleans, 8 October 1864, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>161</sup> Cox, Lincoln and Black Freedom, 100-1.

Having helped to see that the constitution was written with some, if not all, the desired protections for blacks, Lincoln injected himself into the ratification contest. On August 9, he wrote to Banks that he had just been shown a copy of the constitution and was “anxious that it shall be ratified by the people.” To achieve that end he was willing to employ the patronage power, as he told the general: “I will thank you to let the civil officers in Louisiana, holding under me, know at once who of them openly declare for the constitution, and who of them, if any, decline to so declare.”<sup>162</sup> Banks used this authorization effectively to enlist support for ratification and took other steps to support the pro-constitution campaign, which was successful.

The new state legislature chose two U.S. senators and held elections for five Representatives, but it was unclear that Congress would recognize them.

#### CHASE LAYS PIPE: THE ATTEMPT TO SUPPLANT LINCOLN

To attain congressional approval of the Louisiana experiment, Lincoln could have used the assistance of Chase, who had great influence with the Radical wing of the party both in Louisiana and Washington. The treasury secretary, however, was scheming to win the Republican presidential nomination, “at work night and day, laying pipe,” as a Pennsylvania politician put it.<sup>163</sup> In October 1863, Edward Bates noted that “Chase’s head is turned by his eagerness in pursuit of the presidency. For a long time he has been filling all the offices in his own vast patronage, with extreme partizans, and contrives also to fill many vacancies, properly belonging to other departments.”<sup>164</sup> The patronage at his

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<sup>162</sup> Lincoln to Banks, Washington, 9 August 1864, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 7:486.

<sup>163</sup> Wayne McVeagh in Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 120 (entry for 28 November 1863).

<sup>164</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), 310 (entry for 17 October 1863).

disposal included 15,000 jobs.<sup>165</sup> As a rival for the nomination, Chase had little incentive to help Lincoln achieve a legislative victory, even though they shared similar views about Reconstruction policy in the Bayou State.

Chase's prospects appeared good at Washington, where Lincoln enjoyed far less popularity than he did in the country at large.<sup>166</sup> Henry Winter Davis did not "know a public man who is not disgusted with the lack of Presidential qualities in the Prest."<sup>167</sup> In February, Lyman Trumbull reported that "the surface current is running in favor of Mr. Lincoln's renomination, but I find with many that the feeling for Lincoln is only apparent. It is by no means certain that he will be the candidate."<sup>168</sup> Few public men in Washington, the senator said, favor Lincoln's reelection, for there was "a distrust & fear that he is too undecided & inefficient ever to put down the rebellion." Trumbull thought it would not be surprising "if a re-action sets in before the nomination in favor of some man supposed to possess more energy, & less inclination to trust our brave boys in the hands, & under the leadership of Generals who have no heart in the war."<sup>169</sup> One of Trumbull's constituents asserted that "a majority of Republican members of Congress are opposed to Lincoln's renomination."<sup>170</sup> During a visit to Washington in early 1864, William M.

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<sup>165</sup> Frederick J. Blue, Salmon P. Chase: A Life in Politics (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1987), 214.

<sup>166</sup> Shelby M. Cullom, Fifty Years of Public Service: Personal Recollections of Shelby M. Cullom, Senior United States Senator from Illinois (Chicago: McClurg, 1911), 98-99.

<sup>167</sup> Henry Winter Davis to Samuel F. Du Pont, n.p., [9?] January 1864, transcript, S. F. Du Pont Papers, Hagley Museum, Wilmington, Delaware.

<sup>168</sup> Trumbull to N. P. Banks, Washington, 18 February 1864, Banks Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>169</sup> Lyman Trumbull to H. G. McPike, Washington, 6 February 1864, draft, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>170</sup> This was reported by a gentleman named Ross of Fulton County, Illinois, after visiting Washington. W. W. Orme to David Davis, Chicago, 3 April 1864, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

Dickson found “a strong feeling” against Lincoln’s reelection; the Republican party’s “best men” insisted that the president “has been in the way, that our success has been not by him but in spite of him & that he is so inefficient that he must not be permitted to remain in power another four years. But the thing most unfavorable to him, was the fact that the Blairs have assumed with or without his consent the care of his political fortunes.”<sup>171</sup> Lincoln’s support of the Blair family alienated many Ohioans, including Republican state legislators. One of them who had voted in February to endorse the president’s renomination declared in May that Lincoln “must cut loose from the Blairs or sink with them.”<sup>172</sup> In 1863, Senator Henry Wilson had warned that if Lincoln were to announce his intention to run for a second term, he “would be laughed off the course.”<sup>173</sup>

Radicals condemned Lincoln’s purported conservatism, inconsistency, administrative incapacity, and reluctance to make difficult decisions. Henry Ward Beecher lamented that the president’s mind “seldom works clearly or cleanly,” and George Luther Stearns dismissed Lincoln as “unfit by nature and education to carry on the government for the next four years.”<sup>174</sup> The state treasurer of Minnesota hoped that Lincoln would be denied renomination, for though he was “honest and upright no doubt,” nevertheless “we need a great leader in these hard times & not one who must be pushed by the people.”<sup>175</sup> A Kansas abolitionist deplored Lincoln’s “everlasting playing Hawk

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<sup>171</sup> W. M. Dickson to Friedrich Hassaurek, Cincinnati, 15 February 1864, Hassaurek Papers, Ohio Historical Society.

<sup>172</sup> C. H. Spahr to John Sherman, Jamestown, Ohio, 6 May 1863, Sherman Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>173</sup> Franklin B. Sanborn to Moncure D. Conway, Concord, Massachusetts, 31 May 1863, Conway Papers, Columbia University.

<sup>174</sup> Beecher to Chase, Brooklyn, 28 December 1863, Chase Papers, Library of Congress; Stearns to William Lloyd Garrison, 12 September, Boston Commonwealth, 23 September 1864.

<sup>175</sup> Charles Scheffer to Ignatius Donnelly, 1 February 1864, in Martin Ridge, Ignatius Donnelly: The Portrait of a Politician (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 83.

and Buzzard. You never know what to depend on. Sometimes he is just and sometimes he is unjust. Sometimes he is wise and sometimes he is foolish. Sometimes he is earnest and sometimes he is joking. Sometimes he is clear and sometimes he is muddy.”<sup>176</sup> In Massachusetts, Richard Henry Dana sneered that Lincoln was “a shapeless mass of writhing ugliness” who “lacks administrative power” and “is not up to the office.”<sup>177</sup> In April 1864, Lydia Maria Child complained that though God “is doing a great work,” nevertheless “the agents by which He is accomplishing it are so narrow, so cold! The ruling motive of this administration, from the beginning to the present time, seems to have been how to conciliate the Democratic party.”<sup>178</sup>

Radical senators were especially critical of the president. According to Charles Sumner, “there is a strong feeling among those who have seen Mr. Lincoln, in the way of business, that he lacks practical talent for his important place. It is thought that there should be more readiness, and also more capacity, for government.” Sumner likened the president to Louis XVI and opposed his renomination, arguing that any member of the Massachusetts congressional delegation was better qualified for chief executive than the incumbent.<sup>179</sup> Sumner’s colleague from Massachusetts, Henry Wilson, was especially critical of Lincoln behind his back. When asked why he did not voice his disapproval publicly, he replied that Lincoln clearly was so popular with the people that he would be

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<sup>176</sup> August Wattles to Horace Greeley, 6 February 1864, Greeley Papers, New York Public Library.

<sup>177</sup> Richard Henry Dana, Jr., to his father, Richard Henry Dana, Sr., Washington, 4 May 1864, and Lakeville, Connecticut, 6 August 1864, Richard Henry Dana Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>178</sup> Child to Gerrit Smith, Wayland, 22 April 1864, Smith Papers, Syracuse University.

<sup>179</sup> Sumner to Richard Cobden, 18 September 1864, Edward L. Pierce, Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner (4 vols.; Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1877-1893), 4:200.

renominated, and that “bad as that would be, the best must be made of it.”<sup>180</sup> Timothy O. Howe of Wisconsin groused, “I am tired of this administration which I do not really know whether to characterize as many-headed or no-headed.”<sup>181</sup> James W. Grimes of Iowa warned that the president could win reelection only if he dramatically reorganized his cabinet. “The truth is the people have not the slightest confidence in either Stanton Usher Blair Welles or Bates,” Grimes told William P. Fessenden. “There is no administrative ability possessed by either one of them, and some of them are generally supposed to be and I know them to be positively dishonest.”<sup>182</sup> Fessenden in turn scornfully remarked that the people of the North were “woefully humbugged in their notions” of the president, who was “weak as water.” Yet, he acknowledged resignedly, “it will not do to tell the truth, and I see no way but to take another four years of selfish stupidity,” for “Lincoln is, after all, about as good a candidate as we shall be likely to get.” Despite the president’s failings, “the people have a strong faith in his honesty of purpose, and at a time when their endurance is so largely drawn upon, that is a great point.”<sup>183</sup> David Davis believed that politicians “would put Mr. Lincoln aside if they dared. They know their constituents don’t back them, and hence they grumble rather than make open war.”<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> A. G. Riddle, Recollections of War Times: Reminiscences of Men and Events in Washington, 1860-1865 (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1895), 267.

<sup>181</sup> Timothy O. Howe to John F. Potter, Washington, 20 January 1864, Potter Papers Wisconsin State Historical Society.

<sup>182</sup> Grimes to William P. Fessenden, Burlington, Iowa, [6?] August 1864, copy, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College.

<sup>183</sup> Fessenden to his son William, Washington, 7 February 1864; Fessenden to his son Frank, Washington, 23 March 1864; Fessenden to Elizabeth Warriner, Washington, 27 February 1864; Fessenden to Thomas Amory Deblois, Washington, [1?] March 1864, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College.

<sup>184</sup> David Davis to Julius Rockwell, Washington, 24 January 1864, typescript, David Davis Papers, Chicago History Museum.



In May, Massachusetts Judge Ebenezer Rockwood Hoar told John Murray Forbes: “I have come at last, though slowly and reluctantly, to the decided conviction, not only that Mr. Lincoln will be certain to be nominated in June, but that he would be equally certain to be nominated in September.” There was no better alternative, Hoar thought: “I am afraid . . . that he represents about the average (and perhaps even a little better than that) of all that we have to trust for suppressing the rebellion.”<sup>185</sup> Forbes, who deplored Lincoln’s “system of floating along by the impulse of the people,” was of like mind.<sup>186</sup>

Defenders of the administration pointed out that Lincoln’s congressional critics who thought that “he has been right, but slow” ought to remember that “within three years they themselves solemnly resolved that the war should not touch slavery, and even went so far as to adopt an amendment to the constitution to preclude any further amendment that should abolish slavery.” Thus “reproach comes from them with an ill grace.”<sup>187</sup>

Some die-hards would not support Lincoln for reelection under any circumstances. Alfred B. Mullet, an architect working for the treasury department in Washington, considered the president “entirely unfitted by nature, education, and domestic relations for the Chief Magistracy of the American Nation.” Therefore, Mullett “resolved in common with a large number of Republicans, to vote for his re-election under no circumstances. Should any loyal man be a Candidate in opposition to Mr

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<sup>185</sup> Hoar to John Murray Forbes, 4 May 1864, in Moorfield Storey, Ebenezer Rockwood Hoar (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), 140-41.

<sup>186</sup> Forbes to George William Curtis, draft, Boston, 28 April 1864, in Sarah Forbes Hughes, ed., Letters and Recollections of John Murray Forbes (2 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1899), 2:89.

<sup>187</sup> Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 13 February 1864.

Lincoln (should he unfortunately receive the endorsement of the Baltimore Convention) I shall feel it my duty to support him to the extent of my very humble ability. And should there be no choice between Mr Lincoln and a Copperhead, I shall not trouble myself about the matter, believing the difference between the results to be obtained from the cowardice and temporizing of one, will be very nearly the same as the treachery of the other.” Mullet assured Chase that “the Germans the Old Liberty Guard and the War Democracy of the West, despise Mr Lincoln most heartily.”<sup>188</sup> Bradford Wood longed to quit his post as U.S. minister to Denmark, return home, and help nominate a replacement for Lincoln, someone “who adds capacity, energy and courage to honesty,” who “knows men,” and “for whose election an honorable man can work . . . without any misgivings.”<sup>189</sup>

A lack of unity weakened the opposition to the president’s renomination. As New York Senator Edwin D. Morgan observed, Lincoln’s critics did not know “in what manner to organize their party. They are not by any means unanimous for Mr Chase, but would take Grant Fremont Banks or Butler more readily than Mr Lincoln.”<sup>190</sup> Similarly, George Bancroft expressed disappointment “at finding everybody in Wash[ington] opposed to Lincoln & yet no concert of purpose.” There was “a very general disgust among thinking men,” according to that historian.<sup>191</sup>

Lincoln knew all about discontent among congressional Radicals. In mid-February he indicated to Edward Bates that he was “fully apprehensive of the schemes of

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<sup>188</sup> Mullet to Chase, Washington, Washington, 16 May 1864, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>189</sup> Bradford Wood to Chase, Copenhagen, 19 May 1863, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>190</sup> Morgan to Weed, Washington, 6 March 1864, Weed Papers, University of Rochester.

<sup>191</sup> Henry Winter Davis to Samuel F. Du Pont, n.p., 29 February 1864, transcript, S. F. Du Pont Papers, Hagley Museum, Wilmington, Delaware.

the Radical leaders,” whom he called “almost fiendish.” He understood “that they would strike at him at once, if they durst; but they fear that the blow would be ineffectual, and so, they would fall under his power as beaten enemies; and for that only reason the hypocrit[e]s try to occupy equivocal ground – so that, when they fail, as enemies, they may still pretend to be friends.”<sup>192</sup> When Shelby Cullom warned him that everybody in Washington seemed to oppose his renomination, Lincoln replied: “Well, it is not quite so bad as that,” and showed him a congressional directory in which he had marked the inclinations of all members.<sup>193</sup>

In letters and conversations throughout the fall and winter of 1863-64, Chase criticized the president repeatedly and expressed a willingness to replace him. On November 26, he told his son-in-law: “If I were controlled by merely personal sentiments, I should prefer the reelection of Mr. Lincoln to that of any other man; but I doubt the expediency of reelecting anybody, and I think a man of different qualities from those the President has will be needed for the next four years.”<sup>194</sup> That same day he spoke more bluntly to William T. Coggeshall, who summarized the treasury secretary’s remarks in his diary: “Chase despondent. Says it is no use for him to struggle with present administration. Mr. Lincoln purposeless. Firm only from his inertia. Generous, kind, in some regards, wise, but as a precocious child. Has no practical power. No cabinet meetings for two years for counsel. Meetings for jokes. Unless people recover from infatuation of confidence in Lincoln, bankruptcy inevitable. Perhaps that to come because

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<sup>192</sup> Beale, ed., Bates Diary, 333 (entry for 13 February 1864).

<sup>193</sup> Cullom, Fifty Years of Public Service, 98.

<sup>194</sup> Chase to William Sprague, Washington, 26 November 1863, Niven, ed., Chase Papers, 4:204.

we deserve to suffer for participation in slavery. Must be a change at the White House.”<sup>195</sup>

To the Congregationalist minister Joshua Leavitt, who opposed Lincoln’s renomination, Chase recycled some of the arguments he had made in 1862: “Had there been here an Administration in the true sense of the word – a President conferring with his Cabinet and taking their united judgments, and with their aid enforcing activity, economy, and energy in all departments of public service – we could have spoken boldly and defied the world. But our condition here has always been very different. I preside over the funnel; everyone else, and especially the secretaries of War and the Navy, over the spigots – and keep them well open, too. Mr. Seward conducts the foreign relations with very little let or help from anybody. There is no unity and no system, except so far as it is departmental. There is progress, but it is slow and involuntary; just what is coerced by the irresistible pressure of the vast force of the people how under such circumstances, can anybody announce a policy which can only be made respectable by union, wisdom, and courage?”<sup>196</sup>

Coyly Chase hinted that he would not object if friends championed his candidacy. In December he wrote: “I have not the slightest wish to press any claims upon the consideration of friends or the public. There is certainly a purpose, however, to use my name, and I do not feel bound to object to it.”<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Diary of William T. Coggeshall, 26 November 1863, in Freda Postle Koch, Colonel Coggeshall: The Man who Saved Lincoln (Columbus, Ohio: Poko Press, 1985), 63.

<sup>196</sup> Leavitt to Chase, New York, 30 September, 12 November 1863, Chase Papers, Library of Congress; Chase to Leavitt, 24 January 1864, Washington, 24 January 1864, Niven, ed., Chase Papers, 4:262.

<sup>197</sup> Chase to Eli A. Spencer, Washington, 14 December 1863, Niven, ed., Chase Papers, 4:217.

Though Lincoln said he knew that Chase's head was "full of Presidential maggots," and while the president was "trying to keep the maggot out of his brain," he was "much amused" at the secretary's "mad hunt after the Presidency."<sup>198</sup> When told about Chase's frequent criticism of him, he replied that he did not care, for the secretary was "on the whole, a pretty good fellow and a very able man" whose "only trouble is that he has 'the White House fever.'"<sup>199</sup> To be sure, Lincoln thought Chase's maneuvering to win the nomination was in poor taste, but he said in October 1863 that he "shut his eyes to all these performances." Because Chase did good work at the treasury department, he would be kept in the cabinet. If he were to become president, Lincoln thought it would be "all right. I hope we may never have a worse man." For months he had observed Chase currying favor with malcontents. The secretary resembled, Lincoln said, "a bluebottle fly" who lays "his eggs in every rotten spot he can find." Whenever Chase saw "that an important matter is troubling me, if I am compelled to decide it in a way to give offense to a man of some influence he always ranges himself in opposition to me and persuades the victim that he has been hardly dealt by and that he (C[hase]) would have arranged it very differently. It was so with Gen. Fremont – with Genl. Hunter when I annulled his hasty proclamation – with Gen. Butler when he was recalled from New Orleans – with these Missouri people when they called the other day. I am entirely indifferent as to his success or failure in these schemes, so long as he does his duty as the head of the Treasury Department." Lincoln even saw an advantage in Chase's ambition, which he

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<sup>198</sup> [John B. Alley?] to Josiah G. Holland, Washington, 8 August 1865, J. G. Holland Papers, New York Public Library; Thurlow Weed to John Bigelow, in John Bigelow, Retrospections of an Active Life (5 vols.; New York: Baker & Taylor, 1909-1913), 2:110; Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 103 (entry for 29 October 1863).

<sup>199</sup> John B. Alley in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 581-582.

likened to “a horsefly on the neck of a ploughhorse – which kept him lively about his work.”<sup>200</sup> Months later, when Shelby Cullom urged that Chase be fired, Lincoln replied: “Let him alone; he can do no more harm in here than he can outside.”<sup>201</sup>

But Lincoln was not always so indulgent of Chase and his backers. In January 1864, he apparently sent the secretary a sharp note, no longer extant, about a fulsome puff piece touting Chase that appeared in an obscure monthly journal. Chase denied that he had done anything to encourage publication of the “unfortunate biography.”<sup>202</sup>

Much to the dismay of his supporters, Lincoln seemed passive in the face of the Chase challenge. Joseph Medill urged him to act: “Without your own assistance the efforts of your friends won’t avail much. You have it in your power by a few simple moves on the chess board to defeat the game of your rivals, and finally check mate them.”<sup>203</sup> Mark Delahay observed that Lincoln’s “only fault is he will not help himself.”<sup>204</sup> David Davis grouched, “Mr. Lincoln annoys me more than I can express, by his persistence in letting things take their course, – without effort or organization when a combined organization in the Treasury Dept. is in antagonism.” The president, Davis reported, “seems disposed to let the thing run itself & if the people elect him, he will be thankful, but won[’]t use means to secure the thing.”<sup>205</sup> But when Davis described how treasury department employees were being forced to contribute to Chase’s campaign

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<sup>200</sup> Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 103, 93, 78 (entries for 29 and 18 October 1863 and for [July-August 1863]).

<sup>201</sup> Cullom, Fifty Years of Public Service, 94.

<sup>202</sup> John Niven, Salmon P. Chase: A Biography (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 359; Chase to Lincoln, Washington, 13 January 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>203</sup> Medill to Lincoln, Chicago, 17 February 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>204</sup> Mark Delahay to Samuel Curtis, Washington, 12 January 1864, Curtis Papers, Iowa State Archives, Des Moines.

<sup>205</sup> David Davis to W. W. Orme, Washington, 29 and 30 March 1864, Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

fund, and how those who resisted were threatened with dismissal, Lincoln said with a grin that if such threats were carried out, “the head I guess would have to go with the tail.”<sup>206</sup>

Chase’s candidacy was no secret to political observers, though he did not openly announce it until mid-January 1864, when he wrote an Ohio state senator that he approved of efforts being made on his behalf. He insisted that he was motivated only by a desire to promote the public good and not by personal ambition: “If I know my own heart, I desire nothing so much as the suppression of this rebellion and the establishment of union, order, and prosperity on sure and safe foundations; and I should despise myself if I felt capable of allowing any personal objects to influence me to any action which would affect, by one jot or tittle, injuriously, the accomplishment of those objects.”<sup>207</sup> Few men have been as capable of self-deception as Chase.

A Chase-for-president committee was organized in Washington under the leadership of Senator Samuel C. Pomeroy of Kansas. Among Chase’s other backers in the capital were members of the Ohio congressional delegation (Representatives Robert C. Schenck, Rufus P. Spalding, James M. Ashley, James A. Garfield, and Senator John Sherman), the journalists Whitelaw Reid and James M. Winchell, and Senators B. Gratz Brown of Missouri and Henry Wilson of Massachusetts. Chase’s wealthy son-in-law William Sprague and financier Jay Cook helped raise money for Chase. The poet and stockbroker Edmund C. Stedman persuaded Chase to release \$640,000 to a client, the Kansas-Pacific Railroad, for work it had not completed. The corporation was entitled to

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<sup>206</sup> Sam Wilkeson to Sydney Howard Gay, [Washington, ca. February 1864], Gay Papers, Columbia University.

<sup>207</sup> Chase to James C. Hall, Washington, 18 January 1864, Ohio State Journal (Columbus), 11 March 1864.

the money under the Railroad Act of 1862 only after the roadbed had been laid, which was patently not the case. In turn, Stedman became a leading force in the Chase organization, raising funds from railroad men and operating a New York office.

(Lincoln's campaign also raised funds in questionable ways. According to Charles G. Halpine, a knowledgeable New York Democrat and good friend of John Hay, Congress had in early 1864 passed a "Whiskey Bill" allowing certain Republican operatives to corner the local liquor market. In return for this favor, the beneficiaries were expected to contribute half their profits to the "Lincoln Movement." Halpine cited as an example the fifth ward of New York, where promptly after passage of the whiskey legislation, the "Weed wire-pullers" who gained advantages from it paid \$600 to establish a "Lincoln Head Quarters." They printed posters and handbills, hired bands, sponsored ward meetings, and did whatever they could to promote a "Lincoln Endorsement.")<sup>208</sup>

The following month, Chase's supporters issued two documents that embarrassed him mightily. The first, a pamphlet titled "The Next Presidential Election," bitterly denounced the Lincoln administration and, without mentioning Chase, called for the nomination of "a statesman profoundly versed in political and economic science, one who fully comprehends the spirit of the age in which we live." The author (either Winchell or Stedman) excoriated the president as inept when compared with Jefferson Davis.<sup>209</sup> The second document, known as the "Pomeroy Circular," was not so coy. It asserted that Chase deserved the nomination because he had "more of the qualities

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<sup>208</sup> Halpine to J. G. Bennett, Brattleboro, Vermont, 30 March 1864, Lincoln Collection, Chicago History Museum.

<sup>209</sup> Charles R. Wilson, ed., "The Original Chase Organization Meeting and The Next Presidential Election," Mississippi Valley Historical Review 23 (1936):61-79.



needed in a President during the next four years than are combined in any other available candidate; his record, clear and unimpeachable, showing him to be a statesman of rare ability and an administrator of the very highest order, while his private character furnishes the surest obtainable guarantee of economy and purity in the management of public affairs.” Lincoln could not be reelected, the circular argued, and even if he were able to win a second term, the “cause of humanity liberty, and the dignity and honor of the nation” would suffer, for he would temporize even more than he had during his first term.<sup>210</sup> The document’s author, James M. Winchell, said “the arraignment of the Administration made in the circular was one which he [Chase] thoroughly indorsed, and would sustain.”<sup>211</sup>

An ally had advised Chase that Lincoln’s “integrity & apparent unselfishness entitle him to every courtesy,” but these documents were highly discourteous.<sup>212</sup> John Sherman, who supported Chase for president, mailed out copies of the pamphlet under his senatorial frank and received numerous complaints from offended constituents, who denounced it as “a violent, bitter attack on President Lincoln.”<sup>213</sup> “It might do for Vallandigham to send such documents with his endorsement,” wrote a constituent. “But for a Senator elected by the loyal people of Ohio to be guilty of such an act is truly mortifying. There is no use however for a few politicians at Washington to think they can influence the people against ‘Old Honest Abe.’ You can’t do it and, Mr. Sherman, you

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<sup>210</sup> John G. Nicolay and John Hay, Abraham Lincoln: A History (10 vols.; New York: Century, 1890), 8:320.

<sup>211</sup> J. M. Winchell to the editor of the New York Times, Hyde Park, New York, 14 August, New York Times, 15 September 1874.

<sup>212</sup> Richard C. Parsons to Chase, Cleveland, 9 December 1863, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>213</sup> Isaac Welsh to Sherman, Armstrongs Mill, Ohio, 25 February 1864, Sherman Papers, Library of Congress.

need not try it. If you were to resign tomorrow, you could not get ten votes in the Legislature provided it could be shown that you have been circulating consciously such stuff as this.”<sup>214</sup>

(The previous year, while campaigning in Ohio, Sherman had praised Lincoln as “one of the kindest and honestest men that the world affords” and scoffed at charges that the president was trying to establish a despotism. On the contrary, Sherman said he “had often thought that Mr. Lincoln was altogether too kind for the emergency. He hoped his democratic friends would live to be ashamed of all this violent criticism and gross personal abuse as unjust and unpatriotic.”)<sup>215</sup>

The two documents, however, did win Chase the endorsement of some New York newspapers, including the Tribune, the Independent, and George Wilkes’ Spirit of the Times. But in general the circular and the pamphlet backfired, alienating many who might have sympathized with Chase.<sup>216</sup> As Samuel Galloway told the president, Pomeroy’s action “has utterly annihilated the pretensions and prospects of Mr Chase – and has rallied, with a new and more efficient zeal your friends to the support of the Administration. ‘The gun has recoiled and kicked the owner over.’”<sup>217</sup>

When friends attempted to call the circular to Lincoln’s attention, he refused. He had earlier protested impatiently: “I wish they would stop thrusting that subject of the Presidency into my face. I don[’]t want to hear anything about it.”<sup>218</sup> On February 20,

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<sup>214</sup> G. W. Gordon to Sherman, Springfield, 26 February 1864, Sherman Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>215</sup> Speech at Hillsboro, Ohio, in August 1863, New York Evening Post, 15 August 1863.

<sup>216</sup> Hans L. Trefousse, First Among Equals: Abraham Lincoln’s Reputation During His Administration (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 91-92.

<sup>217</sup> Samuel Galloway to Lincoln, Columbus, Ohio, 25 February 1864, Lincoln Papers Library of Congress.

<sup>218</sup> Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 105 (entry for 30 October 1863).

newspapers published the circular, impelling Chase to send an explanation to the president and to offer his resignation. Secretary of the Interior Usher, who regarded the Pomeroy circular as “a most indecent thing” that was “badly conceived” and “badly worded,” predicted that it would “cause a rupture in the cabinet.”<sup>219</sup> But Lincoln told Chase that he had not read the document and did not intend to. Moreover, he wished the secretary to remain at his post. To Usher, the president explained that he believed Chase’s denial, “for he thought it impossible for him (Mr. Chase) to have done such a thing.”<sup>220</sup>

“I do not meddle in these matters,” Lincoln informed a caller. “If any man thinks my present position desirable to occupy, he is welcome to try it, as far as I am concerned.”<sup>221</sup> Struck by the president’s preternatural forbearance, David Davis observed that “Lincoln is a wise man & he won[’]t quarrel with Chase. I w[oul]d dismiss him [from] the cabinet, if it killed me. He pursues the wiser course.”<sup>222</sup> Davis found Chase’s position – “eating a man’s bread and stabbing him at the same time” – problematic.<sup>223</sup>

According to Usher, “Lincoln says but little[,] finds fault with none & judging from his deportment, you would suppose he was as little concerned as any one about the result.”<sup>224</sup> It was widely recognized that, as Supreme Court Justice Noah H. Swayne put

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<sup>219</sup> John Palmer Usher to Richard W. Thompson, Washington, 17, 25 February 1864, R. W. Thompson Papers, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

<sup>220</sup> John P. Usher, President Lincoln’s Cabinet (Omaha: n.p., 1925), 14.

<sup>221</sup> Washington correspondence, 26 February, Ohio State Journal (Columbus), 1 March 1864.

<sup>222</sup> David Davis to Julius Rockwell, Washington, 25 February 1864, photostatic copy, David Davis Papers, Chicago History Museum.

<sup>223</sup> David Davis to Julius Rockwell, Washington, 24 January 1864, typescript, David Davis Papers, Chicago History Museum.

<sup>224</sup> John Palmer Usher to R. W. Thompson, Washington, 25 February 1864, R. W. Thompson Papers, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

it, if Lincoln “were not the self denigrating & most magnanimous man that he is there would be an explosion.”<sup>225</sup>

The Chase boomlet, which never stood much chance of success, ended with a whimper. Even among Radicals its support was weak. In December 1863, Joseph Medill of the Chicago Tribune observed that “Chase's friends are working for his nomination But it is all lost labor[.] Old Abe has the inside track so completely that he will be nominated by ac[c]lamation when the convention meets.” The editor predicted that the electorate would say to Chase: “You stick to finances and be content until after 1868,” and to Grant, “give the rebels no rest, put them through. Your reward will come in due time, but Uncle Abe must be allowed to boss the reconstruction of the Union.”<sup>226</sup>

Many Republicans throughout the North shared this view of Lincoln’s popularity.<sup>227</sup> Elihu B. Washburne concluded that “Lincoln is ahead of all competitors for President. He is very popular and very justly so.”<sup>228</sup> Horace Greeley believed that the people thought of the president “by night & by day & pray for him & their hearts are where they have made so heavy investments.”<sup>229</sup> The New York Times regarded the “universality of popular sentiment, in favor of Mr. Lincoln’s reelection” as “one of the most remarkable developments of the time,” while the Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican noted that the “people hold him to be honest in intention and in act, sound

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<sup>225</sup> Swayne to Samuel J. Tilden, Washington, 19 February 1864, Tilden Papers, New York Public Library.

<sup>226</sup> Medill to Joseph K. C. Forrest, Chicago, 17 December 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>227</sup> Trefousse, First Among Equals, 83-100.

<sup>228</sup> Elihu B. Washburne to Thomas Gregg, Washington, 2 January 1864, W. P. Palmer Collection, Western Reserve Historical Society.

<sup>229</sup> This is a paraphrase of Greeley’s thinking as related by one of his Washington reporters. Homer Byington to Sydney Howard Gay, Washington, 5 March 1864, Gay Papers, Columbia University.

and reliable, and as fast as it is safe to be.”<sup>230</sup> The Republican’s Washington correspondent explained that Lincoln’s “immense hold . . . upon the affections of the people to-day arises principally from the fact that they believe that he is one of them, that he loves them, and that he never attempted to flatter or tickle them for the sake of office.”<sup>231</sup> Republican Senator Lafayette Foster of Connecticut found it anomalous that the president “has a wonderful popularity in the country – nothing seems to shake it. His policy and measures are severely criticised and censured,” and paradoxically the critics “lose all popularity, and indeed become quite obnoxious to the people, while the Presdt. himself escapes unscathed. This is a strange world.”<sup>232</sup>

John W. Forney’s Washington Chronicle declared that Republicans believed in Lincoln, “for he was their party choice. The loyal Democrats believe in him, for he has been kind and considerate to them, and has always, in the most magnificent manner, recognized their devotion to the country. His action in Missouri, where he refused to become a partizan of extreme radicals, and his action in Maryland, where he refused to become a partizan of the slave aristocracy, have united around him men of extreme differences of opinion – and they will support him as the leader of the Union party in the Presidential campaign. He, above all men, can unite the friends of the cause.”<sup>233</sup> David Davis concurred: “I conscientiously believe that no man could have kept the incongruous elements of which the Republican party consists, better than he has. I know of none that

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<sup>230</sup> New York Times, 29 February 1864; Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 7 January 1864.

<sup>231</sup> Washington correspondence by Van [D. W. Bartlett], 24 November, Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 28 November 1863.

<sup>232</sup> Foster to his wife, Washington, 31 May 1864, Foster Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>233</sup> Washington Chronicle, 14 January 1864.

could have done it so well.”<sup>234</sup> The New York Times also paid tribute to Lincoln’s remarkable ability to unify the North. The editors speculated that perhaps “his peculiar transparency of character, his remarkable faculty – never equaled in any other President since the first – of inspiring every one with a sense that he is a thoroughly honest and trustworthy man, has been the only thing that prevented faction from obtaining a fatal ascendancy at the crisis of the war. The people were willing to trust Abraham Lincoln with an amount of power they would have hardly confided to any other man.”<sup>235</sup> Chase supporters acknowledged grudgingly that the president “is daily becoming more popular with the unthinking masses.”<sup>236</sup>

A member of the thinking elite, Charles Eliot Norton, reported that “Mr. Lincoln seems to be the popular choice, & I shall be glad if he be the Union Candidate. Indeed it seems to me of great importance that he should remain in office.” When George Perkins Marsh criticized the president for having “the ideas of a poor white, who has been brought up to look to Heaven for a fine plantation well stocked with negroes, as an expression of the highest bliss,” Norton replied: “You & I would have had the President long ago secure the abolition of Slavery; he might no doubt have done it; he would have been supported by the better men of all the parties; – but I do not feel sure that he could have done so without awaking such opposition as would have succeeded in making it impossible to carry on the war to a successful termination. By degrees the men who would have most bitterly opposed him have been won over to the support of the policy of freedom. A moral revolution such as is going on with us cannot be hurried without

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<sup>234</sup> David Davis to Julius Rockwell, Washington, 25 February 1864, Davis Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>235</sup> New York Times, 15 January 1864.

<sup>236</sup> Thomas Brown to Chase, San Francisco, 4 January 1864, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

disaster. There is continual danger of reaction; of Charles II; of the Bourbons. Suppose Mr. Lincoln to have taken high anti-slavery ground two years ago, – and we should have been likely to have the old union between the corrupt & ignorant Democratic party & the Slave holders cemented with a cement that no future efforts could break till we were turned into a Slave-dependency. Mr. Lincoln is no doubt very slow in arriving at conclusions. He has no rapid intuitions of truth; but his convictions are the more firm from being attained only with difficulty. Experience has already taught him so much that we may hope it will teach him still more.”<sup>237</sup>

Even in Ohio, where Chase assumed that he had widespread support, party leaders rallied behind Lincoln. Buckeye Congressman James A. Garfield, no fan of the president, observed that people in the West “are Lincoln-crazy.”<sup>238</sup> By late March, John Sherman concluded that “public opinion has definitely settled the nomination of Mr. Lincoln” and that it was therefore “useless to contend against it.”<sup>239</sup> A Dayton newspaper editor who wished to see Chase in the White House reported that “five out of six people of the West – in Ohio and Indiana especially – where I have been most observant are enthusiastically in favor of the renomination of Mr Lincoln. The movement is not managed; it is spontaneous beyond the possibility of a doubt; it is a great ground swell which will assuredly overwhelm everything in its path.”<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Charles Eliot Norton to Marsh, Cambridge, 22 February, 19 April 1864, Marsh Papers, University of Vermont.

<sup>238</sup> William H. Kent to Sydney Howard Gay, n.p., 25 February 1864, Gay Papers, Columbia University.

<sup>239</sup> John Sherman to Timothy C. Day, 28 March 1864, quoted in Day to Sherman, Cincinnati, 4 April 1864, Sherman Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>240</sup> W. D. Bickham to Sherman, Dayton, 1 March 1864, Sherman Papers, Library of Congress.

Other Chase admirers warned him that he stood no chance of wresting the nomination from Lincoln.<sup>241</sup> James A. Briggs, Chase's main operative in New York, told him that the state Republican convention would renominate the incumbent "in spite of all that might, could, or should be done. He seems to be a Man of Destiny." (Briggs himself thought Lincoln better qualified for rail-splitter than for president and lamented that he had no "sensibilities of the gentleman.")<sup>242</sup> The Unitarian minister and abolitionist James Freeman Clarke, who professed to admire Chase far more than Lincoln, wrote the treasury secretary in February that "in common times I should be your ardent supporter, but if I were to vote tomorrow, I should vote for Lincoln" because "we cannot afford to try any experiments." The president was a known quantity and you are not, Clarke bluntly informed Chase. "This is the feeling which will actuate seven tenths of the people. They believe Lincoln, on the whole, a safe man – they believe him a man of sense & conscience, & one who is consistent with himself."<sup>243</sup> In fact, large numbers of Northerners had come to regard Lincoln as "the instrument with which our God intends to destroy Slavery," as Schuyler Colfax put it.<sup>244</sup> The chairman of the American Baptist Home Mission Society told delegates to its annual convention in 1864 that he "believed fully that God had raised up His Excellency for such a time as this."<sup>245</sup>

Meanwhile, Lincoln supporters were girding for the campaign. Francis P. Blair, Sr., and his sons, along with Cameron, schemed to have state legislatures and party

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<sup>241</sup> R. L. B. Clarke to Chase, Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, 5 November 1863, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>242</sup> James A. Briggs to Salmon P. Chase, New York, 5 September 1863, 8 June 1864, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>243</sup> Clarke to Chase, Boston, 26 February 1864, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>244</sup> Colfax to Sydney Howard Gay, Washington, 6 February 1864, Gay Papers, Columbia University.

<sup>245</sup> Washington correspondence, n.d., Boston Watchtower, n.d., quoted in Victor B. Howard, Religion and the Radical Republican Movement, 1860-1870 (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 71.



conventions preempt Chase and other rivals by endorsing the president for reelection. In the fall of 1863, the Chief called on Lincoln, who said: “I don’t like the idea of having Chase and Wade against me. I’m afraid I can’t be nominated if they continue to oppose me.” Cameron explained that Andrew Jackson had wanted to be renominated but had pledged to serve only one term. To get around that problem, Democrats in the Pennsylvania legislature wrote him a letter asserting that as long as the Bank War continued, it would be best for him to remain in the White House to press the fight to victory. Taking the hint, Lincoln asked: “Cameron, could you get me a letter like that?” After assuring the president that he could do so, the Chief rushed to Harrisburg and arranged for a letter to be sent similar to the one Jackson had received; it went out on January 5.<sup>246</sup> “I have kept my promise,” Cameron informed Lincoln.<sup>247</sup>

A day later, William E. Chandler of New Hampshire, sure that “a corrupt moneyed ring” sought to defeat Lincoln and nominate Chase, persuaded the Republican state convention in Chase’s native state to follow suit.<sup>248</sup> It was the first such convention to be held, and the treasury secretary’s operatives tried to keep it either from endorsing anyone for president or from congratulating the administration. When the twenty-nine-year-old Chandler, then speaker of the state House of Representatives, heard of this scheme, he introduced a pro-Lincoln resolution (drafted by E. H. Rollins, Nehemiah G.

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<sup>246</sup> Cameron interview, New York Times, 3 June 1878; Washington correspondence 10 January, New York Times, 11 January 1864. The text of the letter appears in the New York Times, 17 January 1864. Cameron had been miffed at the president a few days earlier for failing to honor a request to name John P. Sanderson provost marshal of Pennsylvania. Cameron to David Davis, Lochliel, 21 December 1863, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>247</sup> Burlingame and Ettliger, eds., Hay Diary, 141 (entry for 8 January 1864). Cf. George Bergner to Lincoln, Harrisburg, 14 January 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>248</sup> Chandler to Amos Tuck, Philadelphia, 15 December 1864, draft, William E. Chandler Papers, New Hampshire Historical Society. Chase had hosted Chandler for breakfast in an attempt to win his support as secretary of the New Hampshire Republican state committee. Memorandum of a conversation Chandler had with James F. Colby, 6 November 1911, ibid.

Ordway and other Republican leaders) and lined up support for it.<sup>249</sup> Amos Tuck was opposed, arguing that it was “better not to grieve another aspirant to the Presidency by having N. Hamp. propose Mr. Lincoln . . . . Mr Chase thinks a great deal of the support of his native state.”<sup>250</sup> (Tuck claimed that he favored Lincoln’s reelection but admired Chase, whom he hoped to see occupy the White House some day.)<sup>251</sup> On January 6, the convention enthusiastically adopted Chandler’s resolution. Later that year, when Chandler described these events to Lincoln, the president said: “if Chase or any of his friends makes a raid upon you for what you have done, call upon me.”<sup>252</sup>

Party conventions in Connecticut, Maryland, Indiana, Minnesota, and Iowa quickly followed New Hampshire’s lead, and legislators in New Jersey, California, Maryland, Michigan, Wisconsin, Kansas, Maine, and Rhode Island emulated their counterparts in Pennsylvania.<sup>253</sup> Some found this tactic unseemly. Maine Senator Fessenden expressed “disgust” with the attempts of administration operatives “to control and direct public opinion.”<sup>254</sup> (Fessenden condemned both Chase and Lincoln for paying too much attention to the presidential race while neglecting the public’s business. “The fact that men in their condition, who ought to be thinking only of their country, can be

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<sup>249</sup> “Memorandum of New Hampshire Elections,” memo written by an unknown author in 1865, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>250</sup> Copy of a letter given to Chandler by Tuck on January 6, 1864, about twenty minutes before he introduced the resolution to the convention, Chandler Papers, New Hampshire Historical Society. Cf. Tuck to Chandler, Boston, 12 December 1864, ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Tuck to Chandler, Boston, 5 May 1864, Chandler Papers, New Hampshire Historical Society.

<sup>252</sup> Memorandum of a statement Chandler made to James F. Colby on 6 November 1911, Chandler Papers, New Hampshire Historical Society. In fact, disgruntled Radicals tried to block Chandler’s election as chairman of the New Hampshire Republican State Committee, but they failed badly. “Memorandum of New Hampshire Elections,” memo written by an unknown author in 1865, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>253</sup> New York Tribune, 23 February 1864.

<sup>254</sup> Fessenden to his son William, Washington, 7 February 1864, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College.

indulging their personal ambition, excites my bitter contempt for both of them,” he told his cousin.)<sup>255</sup>

Others thought Lincoln “is trotted out too soon. All other aspirants will combine against him.”<sup>256</sup> Chase’s supporters deplored what they considered the premature launching of the presidential campaign and unsuccessfully called for the postponement of the Republican convention from June to August.<sup>257</sup>

But the principal aspirant, Chase, ignored the advice of some key advisors and withdrew in early March after Republicans in the Ohio legislature overwhelmingly endorsed a resolution on February 26 stating that “the People of Ohio and her Soldiers in the field demand the renomination of Abraham Lincoln to the Presidency of the United States.”<sup>258</sup> According to David Davis, the Pomeroy circular made the legislators “so indignant at Columbus that they determined to express their preference for Lincoln at once.” Davis rightly predicted that “Ohio speaking must . . . put a quietus upon Mr. Chase.”<sup>259</sup> The treasury secretary, who had repeated his 1860 mistake of failing to secure his home state, hoped that the letter in which he declined to run “would tend to increase the public desire that he should remain a candidate,” but it did not.<sup>260</sup> Ironically, he had

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<sup>255</sup> Fessenden to Elizabeth Warriner, Washington, 27 December 1863, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College.

<sup>256</sup> W. M. Dickson to Friedrich Hassaurek, Cincinnati, 15 February 1864, Hassaurek Papers, Ohio Historical Society.

<sup>257</sup> New York Tribune, 1 March 1864; Washington correspondence by Agate [Whitelaw Reid], 26 February, Cincinnati Gazette, 29 February 1864.

<sup>258</sup> Winchell to Chase, Washington, 4 March 1864; James C. Hall to Chase, Columbus, 2 March 1864, Chase Papers Library of Congress; Eugene Roseboom, The Civil War Era, 1850-1873 (vol. 6 of Carl Wittke, ed., The History of the State of Ohio; Columbus: Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, 1944), 430; Chase to Hall, Washington, 5 March 1864, and William H. West to Lincoln, Columbus, 29 February 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Ohio State Journal (Columbus), 27 February 1864.

<sup>259</sup> David Davis to W. W. Orme, Washington, 29 February 1864, typescript, Davis Papers, Chicago History Museum.

<sup>260</sup> Niven, Chase, 355-56; J. M. Winchell to the editor of the New York Times, Hyde Park, New York, 14 August, New York Times, 15 September 1874.

told John Hay in January that it “is singularly instructive to meet so often as we do in life and in history, instances of vaulting ambition, meanness and treachery failing after enormous exertions and integrity and honesty march straight in triumph to its purpose.”<sup>261</sup> Thus he succinctly described his own unsuccessful effort to supplant Lincoln.

Some thought Chase’s withdrawal insincere. Attorney General Bates scoffed that the “forced declention of Mr. Chase is really, not worth much. It only proves that the present prospects of Mr. Lincoln are too good to be openly resisted.” Bates speculated that Chase partisans would act behind the scenes to encourage several men to challenge Lincoln, then present their champion as a compromise candidate.<sup>262</sup> David Davis also called Chase’s withdrawal “a mere sham, & very ungracefully done. The plan is to get up a great opposition to Lincoln through Fremont & others & represent when the convention meets, the necessity of united effort, & that any body can unite &c, except Lincoln, & then present Chase again.”<sup>263</sup> (In fact, as one Radical admitted, his faction did plan “to make use of the many candidates – Chase, Fremont, Butler, Andrew &c, to weaken the Lincoln forces. At the convention it is thought that these different men can unite their friends on one man against Lincoln, and so defeat his nomination.”)<sup>264</sup> Davis marveled both at Chase’s effrontery and the president’s magnanimity: “How Chase can reconcile it with propriety to sustain the attitude to Lincoln that he does, I don’t know. And it must be grievous for Lincoln to bear, but he is ‘obstinately pacific.’ My nature would not tolerate

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<sup>261</sup> Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 141 (entry for 8 January 1864).

<sup>262</sup> Beale, ed., Bates Diary, 345 (entry for 9 March 1864).

<sup>263</sup> Davis to Weed, Washington, 14 March 1864, Weed Papers, University of Rochester.

<sup>264</sup> Franklin B. Sanborn to Moncure D. Conway, Worcester, Massachusetts, 3 May 1864, Conway Papers, Columbia University.

the thing for a moment.”<sup>265</sup> After reading Chase’s letter withdrawing from the race, David remarked with evident disgust: “Look at the meanness in not saying one word about Mr. Lincoln.”<sup>266</sup>

#### A BIG FISH: CHASE’S RESIGNATION

Over the following weeks, relations between Lincoln and Chase rapidly deteriorated. Throughout the winter and early spring, Frank Blair denounced the treasury secretary and the Radicals in several congressional speeches. The two most blistering philippics, delivered on February 27 and April 23, charged with some justification that Chase was improperly using both patronage and trade regulations to help him win the Republican presidential nomination. Furiously, Blair assailed corruption in the cotton dealings of Chase’s son-in-law William Sprague and the treasury secretary’s questionable financial relationship with Jay Cooke. “A more profligate administration of the Treasury Department never existed under any Government,” he declared, adding that “the whole Mississippi valley is rank and fetid with the fraud and corruptions practiced there” by Chase’s agents, who accepted bribes for trading permits. Such permits to sell cotton “are bought in St. Louis and other western cities by politicians and favorites from distant parts of the country, and sold on ’change to the highest bidder, whether he be a secessionist or not, and that too, at a time when the best Union men in these cities are refused permits.” Similarly corrupt, Blair thundered, were monopolies of trading privileges awarded to

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<sup>265</sup> Davis to Julius Rockwell, Washington, 13 March 1864, typescript, Davis Papers, Chicago History Museum.

<sup>266</sup> Davis to Weed, Washington, 14 March 1864, Weed Papers, University of Rochester.

Chase's friends and partisans. "It is the most corrupting and demoralizing system that ever was invented, and has become a public scandal."<sup>267</sup>

Chase and the Radicals, livid with anger, believed that the president had encouraged Blair to deliver these speeches.<sup>268</sup> (Blair did claim that "Lincoln sent for him from the army to defend him and to assault Chase on the floor of the House of Representatives.")<sup>269</sup> Lincoln, irritated and embarrassed by the April 23 barnburner, summoned Blair to the White House. When the congressman volunteered to resign from the army, Lincoln said: "we must not back down" and handed him his commission. This reappointment without congressional approval rankled many lawmakers.

The president recalled that he had heard about the April speech within three hours of its delivery and "knew that another beehive had been kicked over." His initial impulse was to withdraw the order restoring Blair to the army but thought better of it. When Blair informed him that he wished to give a speech on the trade regulations in the Mississippi Valley, Lincoln replied: "If you will do the subject justice, showing fairly the workings of the regulations, and will collect the present all the information on the subject, you will doubtless render a service to the country and do yourself much credit; but if you intend to make it the occasion of pursuing a personal warfare, you had better remain silent."<sup>270</sup>

Convinced that Lincoln had set Blair on him, Chase angrily threatened to resign. Two Ohio Republican congressmen, Rufus P. Spalding and Albert G. Riddle, managed to

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<sup>267</sup> Smith, Blair Family, 2:256-58.

<sup>268</sup> John Wilson to Chase, Chicago, 2 May 1864, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>269</sup> John Bigelow, ed., Letters and Memorials of Samuel J. Tilden (2 vols.; New York: Harper, 1908), 1:233.

<sup>270</sup> Riddle, Recollections, 274-75; Elizabeth Blair Lee to her husband, Washington, 18 January 1864, Virginia Jeans Laas, ed., Wartime Washington: The Civil War Letters of Elizabeth Blair Lee (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 393.

calm the treasury secretary down; they then called at the White House to solicit the president's denial that he had instigated the attack. Lincoln received them civilly but coolly. After they stated that Chase's resignation would be politically disastrous to the party and expressed an earnest wish for the president's reelection, he warmed up. As Riddle remembered it, Lincoln arose and "with great cordially took each of us by the hand and evinced the greatest satisfaction at our presence and the sentiments we had expressed." He then said: "God knows I desire union and harmony as much as any man can." To underscore the point he read them his February 29 letter to Chase regarding the Pomeroy circular. As for the Blairs, he pointed out that they were "strong, tenacious men, having some peculiarities, among them the energy with which their feuds are carried on." He added that they "labored for ten years to build up an anti-slavery party in Missouri, and in an action of ejectment to recover that party in the State, they could prove title in any common law court. Frank has in some way permitted himself to be put in a false position. He is in danger of being kicked out of the house built by himself and by a set of men rather new to it." He had summoned Blair to Washington because "he was most anxious that the country should have the benefit of every Union man elected to the House," including generals like Schenck and Garfield. He explained that "the arrangement had been made without much reference to its legal consequences." En route to the capital, Blair had delivered a speech in St. Louis attacking Chase. At the close of this hour-long interview, Lincoln insisted that he could not see "how the public service could be advanced by his [Chase's] retirement."<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Riddle, Recollections, 273-76; Riddle, "Interview with Prest. Lincoln," 12 December [no year indicated], manuscript in the Riddle Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society.

Riddle and Spalding reported this conversation to Chase, who agreed not to resign. But the episode further exacerbated his alienation from Lincoln. To other friends of Chase, the president insisted that he meant nothing by reappointing Blair and that he disapproved of his speech.<sup>272</sup>

Radicals were furious at both Blair and the president. When Charles Sumner called at the White House to complain about the Blair family, Lincoln defended Frank, saying that Sumner's "whole set" had begun warring on Blair in 1861 during his quarrel with Frémont. The Radicals, Lincoln added, kept up their attacks on Blair long after investigations revealed Frémont to be in the wrong. "Now, Mr. S[umner]," the president concluded, "the B[lairs] are brave people & never whine – but are ready always to fight their enemies and very generally whip them."<sup>273</sup>

Radicals denounced the president for allowing Blair to serve both in the army and in Congress. Blair's commission as a major general had been due to expire on New Years Day, but Lincoln did not accept it. The president faced a dilemma, for the Constitution forbade anyone to hold simultaneously two positions in the government (like general and congressman). After Blair's vitriolic April speech, Radicals insisted that the president submit all relevant documents about Blair's special appointment. When the material submitted by the White House showed that Lincoln pledged to restore Blair to the army after the organization of Congress, Radicals demanded that the president be impeached.

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<sup>272</sup> Washington correspondence by Agate [Whitelaw Reid], 27 April, Cincinnati Gazette, 28 April 1864.

<sup>273</sup> Elizabeth Blair Lee to her husband, Washington, 24 April 1864, Laas, ed., Letters of Elizabeth Blair Lee, 371.



Though that drastic step was not taken, the senate did adopt a resolution condemning Lincoln's violation of the Constitution.<sup>274</sup>

Tension between the president and his treasury secretary steadily mounted, for Chase failed to acknowledge that in order to placate Congress, the wishes of Senators and Representatives had to be consulted about government appointments. Chase demanded exclusive control over the distribution of offices within his department, arguing that fitness alone, not political influence, should be the decisive criterion. In March 1863, Chase arbitrarily replaced the chief federal officeholders in San Francisco without consulting the California delegation or Lincoln. Upon hearing a rumor about that decision, the president summoned journalist Noah Brooks and “with some asperity of manner,” asked if it were true. When Brooks confirmed the story, Lincoln angrily asked why Brooks had not told him earlier and “expressed his astonishment that he had been kept in the dark about so grave a matter.” He was “greatly exercised at what he considered to be an unfair and ungenerous treatment of the California Congressmen” by Chase. Those Representatives shared Lincoln's opinion and, after failing to move Chase, left Washington for New York upon the adjournment of Congress. The president instructed Brooks to wire them asking their return for a consultation. Brooks complied, and the two congressmen who could be reached met with Lincoln, who “expressed regret at the hasty and somewhat arbitrary action” of the treasury secretary and asked them to submit a slate of candidates for the posts in question. Chase, Lincoln said later, was “exceedingly hurt” by this interference with what he considered his prerogatives.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> Smith, Blair Family, 2:259.

<sup>275</sup> Noah Brooks, Washington, D.C., in Lincoln's Time, ed. Herbert Mitgang (1895; Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 112-14; Washington correspondence, 21 March, Sacramento Daily Union, 17 April 1863, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 26-29; Frederick F. Low to Chase, New York, 27 March 1863, Chase

Chase was further hurt when Lincoln directed the removal of one of the secretary's champions, Victor Smith, collector of customs at Port Angelos in the Washington Territory. Smith was a visionary whom the journalist Murat Halstead described as "a queer man," as "cranky as possible, imprudently partisan and zealous, always ready for a controversy," and "one of the fiercest of the devoted admirers of Chase."<sup>276</sup> The White House received many complaints about Smith's corruption and ineptitude, most notably from Lincoln's old friend, Anson G. Henry.<sup>277</sup> It was alleged that Smith had transferred the collector's office to Angelos in order to enhance the value of his property there, had used public funds to secure a personal loan, had cooked his books, and had run his office inefficiently. When a special treasury agent confirmed the truth of these charges, Lincoln resolved to fire Smith even though he was a favorite of Chase. (Relying on his long-standing friendship with Chase, Smith said that he was "so linked into the fibers of the National Government that he could not be removed.") Noah Brooks reported that "the President is bound that corruption and venality in office shall not pass unrebuked by him, cost what it may."<sup>278</sup>

When Chase was told to replace Smith, he angrily submitted his resignation. The president refused to accept it and, as a peace offering, agreed to accept Chase's selection

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Papers, Library of Congress; Aaron A. Sargent to Lincoln, Washington, 21 March 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>276</sup> Brooks, Washington in Lincoln's Time, ed. Mitgang, 114; Murat Halstead to Ida Tarbell, Cincinnati, 2 July 1900, Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.

<sup>277</sup> A. G. Henry to Lincoln, Washington, 13 April 1863; same to same, Olympia, Washington Territory, 21 March 1864; A. G. Henry to Benjamin F. James, Olympia, 6 February 1864, William W. Pickering to Lincoln, Olympia, 20 February 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; A. G. Henry to [Chase], Washington, 16 March 1863, Chase Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Victor Smith to Chase, Washington, 21 February 1863, 13 December 1864, Chase Papers, Library of Congress. Cf. Paul K. Hubbs, president of the Washington Territorial Council, to Thurlow Weed, Port Townsend, 21 August 1862, Weed Papers, University of Rochester.

<sup>278</sup> Washington correspondence, 18, 21 March, Sacramento Daily Union, 14, 17 April 1863, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 25-26, 29.

for the Port Angelos collectorship. Chase had been miffed by other instances of presidential meddling in treasury department patronage, including the removal of the secretary's corrupt ally George S. Denison from the collectorship at New Orleans; the refusal to back Mark Howard for the collectorship at Hartford after a Connecticut senator raised objections; and the appointment in New York of Abram Hyatt, despite Chase's warning that it would cause trouble.<sup>279</sup> (Lincoln alienated several New Yorkers by naming Hyatt a tax assessor.)<sup>280</sup>

The most lucrative patronage job in the treasury department, collector of New York, also became a source of friction between Chase and the president. Hiram Barney had been appointed to that post in 1861 at Chase's behest and over the vehement objections of Seward and Weed. But by early 1864, Lincoln decided that Barney must go. He was, as James A. Briggs put it, "estimable as a man" but had "no ability, or tact, or talent as a politician."<sup>281</sup> In early January, the collector's principal assistant, Albert N. Palmer, was arrested for expediting the issuance of bonds for goods illegally shipped to the South through Nassau.<sup>282</sup> Palmer, an ally of Weed, had exercised significant control over patronage in the customs house. Two months earlier, Deputy Collector Henry B. Stanton, husband of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, was dismissed for various ethical lapses.<sup>283</sup> When the president suggested that Preston King, a shrewd conservative Republican and

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<sup>279</sup> Niven, Chase, 321-22.

<sup>280</sup> Edwin D. Morgan to Lincoln, New York, 19 May 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; John Jay to Chase, New York, 21 May 1863, and William A. Hall to Chase, New York, 22 May 1863, Chase Papers, Library of Congress; Hiram Barney to Chase, New York, 20 May 1863, Chase Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Chase to Edward Haight, Washington, 23 May 1863, ibid.

<sup>281</sup> Briggs to Chase, New York, 30 September 1863, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>282</sup> Hiram Barney to Lincoln, New York, 9 January 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>283</sup> William Hartman, "Custom House Patronage under Lincoln," New-York Historical Society Quarterly 41 (1957):446-49.

former Jacksonian Democrat, be appointed to replace Barney, Chase lamely objected that King knew nothing about the collector's duties. The treasury secretary threatened to resign if Barney were sacked.<sup>284</sup> Thurlow Weed advised the president that Barney's assistants were "constantly intriguing" against him and insisted that a "change in the Custom House was imperatively needed."<sup>285</sup> Other influential Republicans echoed those charges.<sup>286</sup> Lincoln told Lord Thurlow that he would replace the incumbent. Weed favored Abram Wakeman, postmaster of New York, but counseled that gentleman not to press his case because Lincoln was probably going to submit a different name and Wakeman "would only embarrass the question" if he agitated for the post.<sup>287</sup> Wakeman's friends, however, deluged the White House with recommendations for their man.<sup>288</sup> Others championed Judge James W. White, who was especially popular among the Irish.<sup>289</sup> Barney, who had the previous year offered to resign because of failing health, now felt that he must stay on to defend his honor since he now was under attack.<sup>290</sup> (In

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<sup>284</sup> Maunsell B. Field, Memories of Many Men and of Some Women: Being Personal Recollections of Emperors, Kings, Queens, Princes, Presidents, Statesmen, Authors, and Artists, at Home and Abroad, during the Last Thirty Years (New York: Harper, 1874), 304.

<sup>285</sup> Nicolay to Lincoln, New York, 30 March 1864, 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), 132-33.

<sup>286</sup> William P. Dole to John P. Usher, Washington, 20 February 1864; Rush C. Hawkins to Lincoln, New York, 22 February 1864; Moses H. Grinnell to Lincoln, New York, 23 February 1864; Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>287</sup> Weed to David Davis, Albany, 9 February 1864, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>288</sup> Petitions of New York Union Senators and Representatives to Lincoln, Albany, 12 January, 1864; New York Union Committee to Lincoln, Albany, 12 January 1864; John Cochrane to Lincoln, 12 January 1864; Benjamin Field to Abraham Lincoln, Washington, 1 February 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; George Opdyke to Chase, New York, 15 January 1864, Niven, ed., Chase Papers, 4:256-57; E. D. Morgan to Weed, Washington, 12 February 1864, Weed Papers, University of Rochester; R. Campbell to Chase, Bath, 19 January 1864, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>289</sup> E. Ellett to Chase, New York, 19 May 1863, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>290</sup> Hiram Barney to Lincoln, New York, 8 July 1864, Lincoln Papers Library of Congress; J.W. Schuckers, The Life and Public Services of Salmon Portland Chase (New York: D. Appleton, 1874), 477-80.

January, the House Committee on Public Expenditures launched an investigation into the New York customs house.)

Lincoln liked Barney and though he did not doubt the collector's integrity, he concluded that he had "ceased to be master of his position." The president became convinced that Joshua F. Bailey, a special treasury agent in New York, had become "Collector de facto, while Mr. Barney remains nominally so." To show that the collector still enjoyed his confidence, the president offered to appoint him minister to Portugal.<sup>291</sup> But to Weed's intense disappointment, Lincoln postponed action on the collectorship because Chase threatened to resign. He also feared that he would be merely getting "out of one muss into another" since both Simeon Draper, who had been actively promoting Lincoln's renomination, and Wakeman were angling for the job.<sup>292</sup>

In June 1864, tension between Chase and Lincoln burst like an overheated boiler on a Mississippi River steamboat. The occasion for that explosion came when John J. Cisco, assistant treasurer in the New York customs house and a key pro-Chase operative, quit because of failing health. To replace him, Chase proposed Maunsell B. Field, a sycophantic socialite with neither business experience nor political standing. He had served as a clerk in the New York customs house and had been promoted to third assistant secretary by Lincoln as a good-will gesture to Chase. Senator and former governor Edwin D. Morgan adamantly objected to Field, who often failed to show up for

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<sup>291</sup> Lincoln to Chase, Washington, 12 February 1864, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 7:181. On February 27, Weed wrote Lincoln alleging that "Mr Bailey has the 'run' of the Custom-House, making Appointments freely for the benefit of his Chief." New York, 27 February, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. See Bailey to Chase, New York, 5, 27 October 1863, 13, 17 January, 22 February 1864, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>292</sup> David Davis to Weed, Washington, 12 February, 21 March 1864, Weed Papers, University of Rochester; Charles S. Bartles to Lyman Trumbull, New York, 1 September 1864, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress; Nicolay to Lincoln, New York, 30 March 1864, in Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 132-33.

work.<sup>293</sup> In March, Morgan complained that “Chase will do nothing but what suits his purposes, and the President is slow to take any step in opposition to his wishes.” Frustrated, Morgan was “not disposed to let the matter drop.”<sup>294</sup> Morgan had also protested against the appointment of Democrats to customs house positions.<sup>295</sup>

Lincoln regarded Field as morally objectionable, telling the senate finance committee: “I could not appoint him. He had only recently at a social gathering, in [the] presence of ladies and gentlemen, while intoxicated, kicked his hat up against the ceiling, bringing discredit upon us all, and proving his unfitness.”<sup>296</sup> (On a later occasion, Lincoln similarly explained why he opposed the appointment of a man highly recommended by influential supporters: “He is a drunkard. I hear bad stories of his moral character, yet his backers are among the best Republicans in the State. I like the fellow’s friends, but it goes against my conscience to give the place to a man who gambles and drinks.”)<sup>297</sup> When Chase insisted on Field, Lincoln patiently explained that he could not “without much embarrassment” accommodate him, “principally because of Senator Morgan’s very firm opposition to it.” Lincoln offered to let Chase select among three candidates who were acceptable to Morgan. When the secretary asked for a White House meeting, the exasperated president replied bluntly that “the difficulty does not, in the main part, lie within the range of a conversation between you and me.” He explained that it had been “a

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<sup>293</sup> John P. Usher to Richard W. Thompson, Washington, 5 July 1864, R. W. Thompson Papers, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana; James A. Rawley, Edwin D. Morgan, 1811-1883: Merchant in Politics (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 196.

<sup>294</sup> Morgan to Weed, Washington, 6 March 1864, Weed Papers, University of Rochester.

<sup>295</sup> James W. White to Sydney Howard Gay, Washington, 3 July 1864, Gay Papers, Columbia University.

<sup>296</sup> Conness in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 564. Field’s drunken antics were described in Gustavus V. Fox to his wife Virginia, Washington, 1 July 1864, Fox Papers, New-York Historical Society. Fox’s informant was his wife’s sister, Minna, wife of Montgomery Blair.

<sup>297</sup> Washington correspondence, 27 April, Boston Evening Traveler, 29 April 1865.

great burden” to retain Barney in the face of intense criticism of the collector by many influential New Yorkers and that the appointment as appraiser in the custom house of the Radical Judge John T. Hogeboom, at Chase’s request, led Republicans in the Empire State to “the verge of open revolt.” Field’s selection against the wishes of Morgan would, on top of those other problems, strain party unity to the breaking point.<sup>298</sup>

On June 29, Chase huffily offered his resignation yet again, doubtless assuming that the president would back down as he had done on earlier occasions. But Lincoln shocked him by accepting. As the president explained to John Hay, Chase in effect was saying: “You have been acting very badly. Unless you say you are sorry, & ask me to stay & agree that I shall be absolute and that you shall have nothing, not matter how you beg for it, I will go.”<sup>299</sup> The president was in no mood to trifle, contending that Chase “is either determined to annoy me, or that I shall pat him on the shoulder and coax him to stay. I don’t think I ought to do it. I will not do it. I will take him at his word.”<sup>300</sup>

When Ohio Governor John Brough offered to effect a reconciliation, Lincoln replied: “This is the third time he has thrown this [resignation] at me, and I do not think I am called to continue to beg him to take it back, especially when the country would not go to destruction in consequence.” When the governor persisted, Lincoln cut him off: “I know you doctored the matter up once, Brough, but I reckon you had better let it alone this time.”<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> Lincoln to Chase, Washington, 28 June 1864, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 7:412-13.

<sup>299</sup> Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 213 (entry for 30 June 1864).

<sup>300</sup> Lucius Eugene Chittenden, Recollections of President Lincoln and His Administration (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1891), 379.

<sup>301</sup> William Henry Smith, “Private Memoranda – War Times,” 12 July 1864, photocopy, J. G. Randall Papers, Library of Congress.

Fueling the tension between Lincoln and Chase was the secretary's voracious appetite for deference, which the president gave in insufficient quantity. John Hay claimed that it was Lincoln's "intellectual arrogance and unconscious assumption of superiority" that Chase "could never forgive." Hay clearly exaggerated, for Lincoln was hardly "intellectually arrogant." But despite his courteous, self-abnegating manner and his self-deprecating humor, Lincoln had a deep-rooted sense of self that lent him dignity, strength, and confidence. These qualities were perhaps interpreted as arrogance by Chase, who may have projected onto Lincoln some of his own extreme self-regard. At all events, when he accepted Chase's resignation, Lincoln was not acting merely out of pique; Chase wanted to dominate the administration, and the president would not let him do so. To be sure, Lincoln did not like Chase personally, much though he admired his ability and commitment to freedom. Certainly he disliked other Radicals, more because of their style than their ideology. While he shared with them a strong desire to end slavery and to prosecute the war vigorously, he was exasperated by what he called "the self-righteousness of the Abolitionists" and "the petulant and vicious fretfulness of many radicals."<sup>302</sup>

Chase was especially obnoxious because, as General (and future president) Rutherford B. Hayes of Ohio observed, he was "cold, selfish, and unscrupulous." Hayes thought "political intrigue, love of power, and a selfish and boundless ambition were the striking features of his life and character."<sup>303</sup> Another Ohioan, a former Whig congressman who claimed to "know Chase thoroughly," called him "ambitious, cold-

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<sup>302</sup> William D. Kelley, Lincoln and Stanton (New York: Putnam's, 1885), 86; Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 216 (entry for 1 July 1864).

<sup>303</sup> Charles Richard Williams, ed., Diary and Letters of Rutherford Birchard Hayes (5 vols.; Columbus: Ohio State Archeological and Historical Society, 1922-1926), 5:243.



hearted and utterly selfish,” one who “always disparages and never speaks well of any man who is likely to be in the way of his vaulting ambition. He is cunning and industrious in laying plans for the accomplishment of his ends, and always sees that the friends he can use are put in position where they can have power to help him.”<sup>304</sup> A Philadelphia abolitionist concurred, deeming Chase “Big-brained, cold-hearted, selfish, suspicious and parsimonious.”<sup>305</sup>

Having made up his mind to let Chase go, Lincoln summoned John Hay to take a message to Capitol Hill. “When does the Senate meet today?” he asked Hay.

“Eleven o’clock,” replied the youthful secretary.

“I wish you to be there when they meet. It is a big fish. Mr. Chase has resigned and I have accepted his resignation. I thought I could not stand it any longer.”

To succeed Chase, Lincoln picked another quondam governor of Ohio, David Tod, a Douglas-Democrat-turned-Republican whom he described as a friend “with a big head full of brains.” Tod was also a gifted raconteur and successful businessman, but the senate finance committee objected to him as “too little known and inexperienced for the place.” When members of that body called at the White House, some were angry and others frightened. Lincoln explained “that he had not much personal acquaintance with Tod,” that he “had nominated him on account of the high opinion he had formed of him while governor of Ohio,” that “the Senate had the duty & responsibility of considering & passing upon the question of fitness, in which they must be entirely untrammelled.” But he “could not in justice to himself or Tod withdraw the nomination.” When the

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<sup>304</sup> Lewis D. Campbell to Weed, Hamilton, Ohio, 23 November 1864, Weed Papers, University of Rochester.

<sup>305</sup> B. Rush Plumly to N. P. Banks, New Orleans, 20 October 1864, Banks Papers, Library of Congress.

incumbent governor of Ohio, John Brough, urged him to do so, Lincoln said “emphatically that he would not.” Brough accurately predicted that Tod would decline because of poor health “and the fact that in the nomination he got all the honor without the hard work; and that Tod was a man of good common sense and would not willingly place himself in a position which he was not capable of filling.” In and out of Congress “a general feeling of depression and gloom” prevailed, for people regarded the abrupt change as “a dangerous symptom of general decay and break-up of the administration.” A panicky Elihu Washburne told Lincoln that it was “a great disaster: At this time, ruinous; this time of military unsuccess, financial weakness, Congressional hesitation on the question of conscription & imminent famine in the West.” Another congressman, the influential Samuel Hooper of Boston, said that he felt “very nervous & cut up.” The solicitor of the treasury informed the president that a mass resignation in the department was threatened. On July 3, a New York judge expressed fear that “there cannot fail to be an explosion if a more sane course in not pursued than that upon which the President seems now bent.” Hay concluded that “the President has made a mistake,” and financiers and merchants worried that Lincoln “had no conception of the fearful financial crisis which we are approaching, since he was willing to offer the most important place in his cabinet to a nobody from Ohio.”<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Burlingame and Ettliger, eds., Hay Diary, 212-214 (entry for 30 June 1864); New York Daily News, 1 July 1864; Washington correspondence, 1 July, Cincinnati Commercial, n.d., copied in the New York Daily News, 12 July 1864; John Sherman, John Sherman's Recollections of Forty Years in the House, Senate and Cabinet: An Autobiography (2 vols.; Chicago: Werner, 1896), 1:337; William Henry Smith, “Private Memoranda – War Times,” 12 July 1864, photocopy, J. G. Randall Papers, Library of Congress; James W. White to Horace Greeley, Washington, 3 July 1864, Sydney Howard Gay Papers, Columbia University; Franklin B. Sanborn to Moncure D. Conway, Florence, Massachusetts, 10 July 1864, Conway Papers, Columbia University.

Indeed, Lincoln had blundered. Though his exasperation with Chase was entirely understandable, his willingness to let the treasury secretary go at such a time showed poor judgment. As D. W. Bartlett remarked, Lincoln “seems to have been deserted of his usual good sense” when he submitted Tod’s name, for the “feeling was unanimous in Congress that for such a man to succeed Mr. Chase would be ruinous to the finances.”<sup>307</sup> The blow-up did not surprise Interior Secretary Usher, who remarked that there had “been a bad state of feeling for a long time, and since the Pomeroy circular no attempt at concealment.” Chase “has rarely attended Cabinet meetings and has been apparently greatly disgusted at every body.”<sup>308</sup>

That night, as Governor Brough had predicted, Tod wired his declination to the “very low spirited” president. Immediately Lincoln authorized Hay to inform the senate, where Tod received a backhanded compliment from one member: “Not such a fool as I thought he was.” The next morning upon waking, Lincoln decided to nominate William Pitt Fessenden, chairman of the senate finance committee, in his stead. As that senator sat in the White House reception room awaiting an interview, Lincoln dispatched Hay with the nomination to the senate, where it was instantly ratified. When the president told Fessenden of this move, the amazed senator, pleading poor health, said: “But it hasn’t reached there – you must withdraw it – I can’t accept.” Lincoln replied: “If you decline, you must do it in open day: for I shall not recall the nomination.”<sup>309</sup> The senator turned down the offer in a letter to Lincoln, who refused to receive it, “saying that Providence

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<sup>307</sup> Washington correspondence, n.d., Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, n.d., copied in the St. Paul Press, 22 July 1864.

<sup>308</sup> Usher to Richard W. Thompson, Washington, 5 July 1864, R. W. Thompson Papers, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

<sup>309</sup> Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 216 (entry for 30 June 1864).

had pointed out the man for the crisis,” that “none other could be found,” and that he “had no right to decline.” When Fessenden protested that the job would kill him, Lincoln replied: “Very well, you cannot die better than in trying to save your country.” At the president’s urging, several leading Republican lobbied Fessenden, insisting that he must “save the country.” From chambers of commerce and individuals, telegrams and letters poured into the senator’s office warning that his “refusal would produce a disastrous effect upon public credit, already tottering,” and might paralyze the North at “the most critical juncture” in the nation’s history. In response to this overwhelming pressure, Fessenden reluctantly acquiesced “with all the feeling of a man being led to execution.”<sup>310</sup>

Lincoln, “in high spirits,” exclaimed to Seward: “The Lord has never yet deserted me, and I did not believe he would this time!” To Hay he recounted his thought process while mulling over Chase’s replacement: “It is very singular, considering that this appointment of F[essenden]’s is so popular when made, that no one ever mentioned his name to me for that place. Thinking over the matter two or three points occurred to me. First he knows the ropes thoroughly: as Chairman of the Senate Committee on Finance he knows as much of this special subject as Mr. Chase. 2<sup>nd</sup> he is a man possessing a national reputation and the confidence of the country. 3<sup>rd</sup> He is a radical.” But there were some potential drawbacks, he told Hay: “the Vice President & Sec Treasury coming from the same small state [Maine] – though I thought little of that: then that Fessenden from the state of his health is of rather a quick & irritable temper: but in this respect he should be pleased with this incident; for, while for some time he has been running in rather a pocket

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<sup>310</sup> Fessenden to Elizabeth Warriner, Washington, 3 July 1864; Fessenden to Edward [Fan?], Washington, 3 July 1864; Fessenden to his son William, Washington, 8 July 1864, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College; Fessenden to John Searle Tenney of Maine, n.p. n.d., in Fessenden, Fessenden, 1:316-18.

of bad luck – such as [the] failure to renominate Mr. Hamlin [for vice-president] makes possible a contest between him and the V. P. the most popular man in Maine for the election [to the senate] which is now imminent – & the fact of his recent spat in the Senate where Trumbull told him his ill-temper had left him no friends – this thing has developed a sudden & very gratifying manifestation of good feeling in his appointment, his instant confirmation, the earnest entreaties of every body that he may accept & all that. It cannot but be very grateful to his feelings.”<sup>311</sup>

The appointment of Fessenden undid much of the damage caused by Lincoln’s unwillingness to appease Chase. Republican newspapers lauded the new secretary as a “Senator who never left his post, never made a speech without a purpose, and always sharp, clear, brief in debate . . . a positive, daring statesman.” Even the Democratic New York World called Fessenden “[u]nquestionably the fittest man in his party for that high trust.”<sup>312</sup> But another Democratic newspaper, the New York Daily News, expressed doubt that Fessenden could repair all the damage that “Mr. Chase and his nigger ideas” had done.<sup>313</sup>

After a few weeks on the job, Fessenden praised Lincoln as “a man of decided intellect, and a good fellow – able to do well any one thing, if he was able, or content, to confine his attention to that thing until it was done.” Unfortunately, however, “[i]n attempting to do too many [things],” the president “botches them all.”<sup>314</sup>

## RENOMINATION

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<sup>311</sup> Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 216 (entry for 30 June 1864).

<sup>312</sup> Charles A. Jellison, Fessenden of Maine, Civil War Senator (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1962), 182-83.

<sup>313</sup> New York Daily News, 2 July 1864.

<sup>314</sup> Fessenden to Elizabeth Warriner, Washington, 4 September 1864, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College.

With Chase out of the presidential race, Lincoln's chances for renomination, which he keenly desired, seemed excellent. A leading Pennsylvania Republican thought that "anxiety for a renomination was the one thing ever uppermost in his mind during the third year of his administration."<sup>315</sup> Leonard Swett thought Lincoln "was much more eager" for a second term than had had been for his first.<sup>316</sup> The provost marshal general noted that although Lincoln "had no bad habits," he did have "one craving that he could not overcome: that was for a second term."<sup>317</sup> Lincoln, whose sense of duty was strong, would not have regarded his ambition as a "bad habit," although he once referred to ambition as an "infirmity" and on another occasion told William Herndon that "if ever American society and the United States government are demoralized and overthrown it will come from the voracious desire of office – this struggle to live without toil – work and labor – from which I am not free myself."<sup>318</sup> Yet, as he wrote to Joseph Hooker, he considered that ambition "within reasonable bounds, does good rather than harm."<sup>319</sup> Seldom in history has anyone's ambition produced as much good as Lincoln's.

Lincoln frankly acknowledged his desire for a second term. "If the people think that I have managed their case for them well enough to trust me to carry up to the next term, I am sure that I shall be glad to take it," he told Noah Brooks in 1863.<sup>320</sup> "A second term would be a great honor and a great labor, which I would not decline if tendered," he

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<sup>315</sup> Alexander K. McClure, Abraham Lincoln and Men of War-Times (Philadelphia: Times, 1892), 136.

<sup>316</sup> Swett to Herndon, Chicago, 17 January 1866, in Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants: Letters, Interviews, and Statements about Abraham Lincoln (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 164.

<sup>317</sup> James B. Fry in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 390.

<sup>318</sup> Helen Nicolay, Personal Traits of Abraham Lincoln (New York: Century, 1912), 304-305; Herndon, "Analysis of the Character of Lincoln," Abraham Lincoln Quarterly 1 (1941):406-407.

<sup>319</sup> Lincoln to Hooker, Washington, 26 January 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:78.

<sup>320</sup> Brooks, "Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln," in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 216.

wrote to E. B. Washburne in October of that year.<sup>321</sup> Two months later he made a similar statement to Leonard Swett: “Until very recently I expected to see the Union safe and the authority of the Government restored before my term of office expired. But as the war has been prolonged, I confess that I should like to see it out, in this chair. I suppose that everybody in my position finds some reason, good or bad, to gratify or excuse their ambition.”<sup>322</sup> To a congressman Lincoln said: “I do not desire a renomination, except for the reason that such action on the part of the Republican party would be the most emphatic indorsement which could be given to the policy of my Administration.”<sup>323</sup> When Thaddeus Stevens spoke to him of his electoral chances, the president remarked: “I confess that I desire to be re-elected. God knows I do not want the labor and responsibility for the office for another four years. But I have the common pride of humanity to wish my past four years Administration endorsed.”<sup>324</sup>

To others, Lincoln expressed a stoic willingness to be passed over. In the spring of 1864, he told a journalist that he was not yet a formal candidate for a second term and that he “was not quite sure whether he desired a renomination. Such had been the responsibility of the office – so oppressive had he found its cares, so terrible its perplexities – that he felt as though the moment when he could relinquish the burden and retire to private life would be the sweetest he could possibly experience.” Still, he “would not deny that a re-election would also have its gratification to his feelings.” He said that he “did not desire it for any ambitious or selfish purpose, but after the crisis the country

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<sup>321</sup> Lincoln to Washburne, Washington, 26 October 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:78, 6:540.

<sup>322</sup> New York Commercial Advertiser, n.d., copied in an unidentified clipping, J. G. Randall Papers, DLC.

<sup>323</sup> Nicolay and Hay, Lincoln, 9:59.

<sup>324</sup> Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 78-79.

was passing through under his presidency and the efforts he had made conscientiously to discharge the duties imposed upon him, it would be a very sweet satisfaction to him to know that he had secured the approval of his fellow citizens and earned the highest testimonial of confidence they could bestow.”<sup>325</sup> On the eve of the party’s national convention, he said “that he was not at all anxious about the result; that he wanted the people to be satisfied, but as he now has his hand in, he should like to keep his place and finish up the war; and yet, if the people wished a change in the presidency, he had no complaint to make.”<sup>326</sup> To a friend he voiced a similar willingness to be passed over: “I am only the people’s attorney in this great affair. I am trying to do the best I can for my client – the country. But if the people desire to change their attorney, it is not for me to resist or complain. Still, between you and me, I think the change would be impolitic, whoever might be substituted for the present counsel.”<sup>327</sup>

After Chase’s withdrawal from the race, the most serious potential threat to Lincoln’s renomination was posed by Grant, whose great popularity after the victories at Vicksburg and Chattanooga was a source of concern. In the fall of 1863, the New York Herald began touting the general for president, and the chairman of the Ohio Democratic Central Committee told Grant that the party wanted him for their standard bearer. In Pennsylvania, Alexander K. McClure, fearing that Lincoln might be unelectable, hinted that the Republicans would be wise to nominate Grant lest the Democrats did so.<sup>328</sup> Elihu B. Washburne, the general’s chief sponsor in Congress, warned him that earlier in the

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<sup>325</sup> James M. Winchell, “Three Interviews with President Lincoln,” Galaxy, 16 (July 1873):40-41.

<sup>326</sup> Robert Livingston Stanton, “Reminiscences of President Lincoln,” (ca. 1883), 8, Robert Livingston Stanton Papers, New York Public Library.

<sup>327</sup> Noah Brooks, Abraham Lincoln and the Downfall of American Slavery (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1894), 385.

<sup>328</sup> McClure to Thaddeus Stevens, Chambersburg, 9 March 1864, Stevens Papers, Library of Congress.



war some of those “now clamoring the loudest in that regard, were the most bitter in your denunciation.” The Illinois congressman urged Grant not to challenge Lincoln, who he said had been exceptionally supportive of the general: “No man can feel more kindly and more grateful to you than the President. I have never asked anything in regard to you, but what he has most promptly and cheerfully granted.” Recalling Lincoln’s support of the general after the near-debacle at Shiloh, Washburne said Lincoln would “have my ever lasting gratitude.”<sup>329</sup> (Lincoln asked Jesse K. Dubois: “do you know that at one time I stood solitary and alone here in favor of General Grant?”)<sup>330</sup>

In December 1863, Washburne introduced a bill reestablishing the rank of lieutenant general, which only George Washington and Winfield Scott had previously held. Grant’s close friend and investment counselor, J. Russell Jones, told the congressman that Lincoln would promote Grant to that exalted rank if the general would back the president for reelection. Washburne replied: “that is the programme I desire. Lincoln will then go in easy, and Grant must be made Lieut Genl.” Jones assured Grant that he could gain the Democratic presidential nomination but that he could not defeat Lincoln.<sup>331</sup>

Grant discouraged talk of his candidacy, declaring that the only office he wanted was the mayoralty of his hometown so that he could, as he put it, “build a new sidewalk from my house to the depot.”<sup>332</sup> Lincoln allegedly shrugged off the possibility of a Grant challenge, saying that if he “could be more useful than I in putting down the rebellion, I

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<sup>329</sup> Washburne to Grant, Washington, 24 January 1864, The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant, ed. John Y. Simon (28 vols.; Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967-2008), 9:522-23.

<sup>330</sup> Chicago Republican, n.d., copied in the New York Evening Post, 14 June 1865.

<sup>331</sup> Washburne’s letter is quoted in Jones to Grant, 14 January 1864, Simon, ed., Grant Papers, 9:542.

<sup>332</sup> Brooks Simpson, Ulysses S. Grant: Triumph Over Adversity, 1822-1865 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 254.

would be quite content. He is fully committed to the policy of emancipation and employing negro soldiers; and with this policy faithfully carried out, it will not make much difference who is President.”<sup>333</sup> In fact, Lincoln was anxious about the general’s intentions. Desiring reassurance from him, Lincoln at the suggestion of Washburne asked Jones about his friend’s views on the presidency. When Jones showed him a letter from Grant denying any political aspirations and voicing strong support for Lincoln, the president replied: “you will never know how gratifying that is to me. No man knows, when that presidential grub gets to gnawing at him, just how deep it will get until he has tried it; and I didn’t know but what there was one gnawing at Grant.”<sup>334</sup> Lincoln also asked Frank Blair to sound out Grant. The congressman obliged by writing to the general, who replied that he had “no political aspirations either now or for the future” and enjoined Blair to share his letter with nobody except the president.<sup>335</sup>

Grant did not publicly announce his unwillingness to run because, as his chief aide John Rawlins explained in March, if the general published “a letter of declination now,” it “would place him much in the position of the old maid who had never had an offer declaring she ‘would never marry;’ besides it would be by many construed into a modest way of getting his name before the country in connection with the office.”<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> Albert D. Richardson, A Personal History of Ulysses S. Grant (Hartford: American Publishing Company, 1868), 407.

<sup>334</sup> Jones’s statement in Ida Tarbell, The Life of Abraham Lincoln, Drawn from Original Sources and Containing Many Speeches, Letters and Telegrams Hitherto Unpublished (New York: Doubleday & McClure, 1900), 2:188. William S. McFeeley doubts that Lincoln said this, but it sounds very much like what James B. Fry recalled Lincoln saying. William S. McFeeley, Grant: A Biography (New York: Norton, 1981), 163-64; Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 390.

<sup>335</sup> Simon, ed., Grant Papers, 10:166-67. See also Laas, ed., Letters of Elizabeth Blair Lee, 355, and Peter L. Foy to Francis P. Blair Jr., St. Louis, 31 January 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>336</sup> Rawlins to James H. Wilson, 3 March 1864, Simon, ed., Grant Papers, 9:544.

Grant did, however, write a private letter to the Ohio Democrats emphatically rejecting their appeal for him to act as their standard bearer.<sup>337</sup>

Convinced that he would not have Grant as a rival, Lincoln threw his support behind the bill reviving the post of lieutenant-general; Congress passed it in late February.<sup>338</sup> As soon as he signed the legislation, the president nominated Grant for that honor. In July 1863, he had told General Sickles that he appreciated Grant's uncomplaining nature: "He doesn't worry and bother me. He isn't shrieking for reinforcements all the time. He takes what troops we can safely give him . . . and does the best he can with what he has got, and doesn't grumble and scold all the while."<sup>339</sup> To Burnside, he described Grant as a "copious worker and fighter, but a very meager writer or telegrapher."<sup>340</sup>

Though he admired the general, in 1862 Lincoln found it necessary to overrule an infamous order that Grant issued as commander of the Department of Tennessee. Like many of his countrymen, the general was a moderate nativist, feeling antipathy for Catholics, Mexicans, and immigrants. During the Mexican War, he wrote from the front that "the country must have an Anglo Saxon population before it can be anything. The church has all the power, all the wealth." After that war, he joined an anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant organization, the Order of the Star Spangled Banner, whose members were called Know Nothings. In 1859, he complained that immigrants had more privileges than native-born citizens. Sixteen years later, as president he publicly denounced attempts to

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<sup>337</sup> Grant to Barnabas Burns, Chattanooga, 17 December 1863, Simon, ed., Grant Papers, 9:541.

<sup>338</sup> Simpson, Grant, 257-58.

<sup>339</sup> James F. Rusling, Men and Things I Saw in Civil War Days (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1899), 16.

<sup>340</sup> Lincoln to Burnside, Washington, 27 July 1864, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:350.

have public funds given to Catholic schools, which he implied were hotbeds of “superstition, ambition and ignorance.” In his subsequent annual message to Congress, he suggested that “priestcraft” nurtured “tyranny and oppression” and called for the taxation of church property, a burden that would disproportionately affect Catholics.<sup>341</sup>

Grant also shared the anti-Semitism widespread among his fellow Christians. The most blatant manifestation of that prejudice was his December 1862 order declaring that the “Jews, as a class, violating every regulation of trade established by the Treasury Department, and also Department orders, are hereby expelled from the Department.” The “Jews seem to be a privileged class,” he told the war department.<sup>342</sup> He hoped to discourage cotton traders, some of them Jewish, who frequently violated the complicated rules promulgated in Washington. Over two dozen Jews were promptly expelled from Paducah, Kentucky.<sup>343</sup>

Democrats condemned the “detestable” order. “A whole class of people are brought to mortification by a military decree, which, if it had any justification at all, should have been made to apply to individuals alone,” declared the Cincinnati Enquirer.<sup>344</sup>

On January 3, when a Jewish delegation from the Queen City called at the White House to protest, Lincoln averred that neither he nor Halleck could believe that Grant had issued such document. When a copy of the general’s Orders No. 11 was shown him, he

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<sup>341</sup> Tyler Anbinder, “Ulysses S. Grant, Nativist,” Civil War History 43 (1997): 119-40.

<sup>342</sup> OR, I, 17, 2:422.

<sup>343</sup> C. J. Kaskel to the editor, on board the Sandusky, 28 December 1862, Cincinnati Enquirer, 2 January 1863.

<sup>344</sup> Cincinnati Enquirer, 4 January 1863.

asked rhetorically: “And so the children of Israel were driven from the happy land of Canaan?”

“Yes, and that is why we have come unto Father Abraham’s bosom, asking protection,” replied the group’s leader.

“And this protection they shall have at once,” said the president, who promptly instructed Halleck to countermand Grant’s order.<sup>345</sup>

On January 7, Lincoln had an “informal and friendly” interview with another Jewish delegation, led by Rabbi Isaac M. Wise of Cincinnati, who called to thank him for revoking Orders No. 11. Addressing them “like a simple, plain-spoken citizen,” the president voiced “his surprise that Gen. Grant should have issued so ridiculous an order, and added – ‘to condemn a class is, to say the least, to wrong the good with the bad. I do not like to hear a class or nationality condemned on account of a few sinners.’” The rabbi reported that Lincoln “fully illustrated to us and convinced us that he knows of no distinction between Jew and Gentile, that he feels no prejudice against any nationality, and that he by no means will allow that a citizen in any wise be wronged on account of his place of birth or religious confession.” Wise added that the president “manifested a peculiar attachment” to Jews and “tried in various forms to convince us of the sincerity of his words in this matter.”<sup>346</sup>

Later Halleck told Grant that Lincoln “has no objection to your expelling traders & Jew peddlars [sic], which I suppose was the object of your order, but as it in terms

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<sup>345</sup> Korn, American Jewry and the Civil War (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1951), 125.

<sup>346</sup> Washington correspondence, 8 January, by Isaac M. Wise, The Israelite (Cincinnati), 16 January 1863 (vol. 9, #28); “The Last of General Grant’s Order,” *ibid.*, 23 January 1863; Washington correspondence, 7 January, New York Tribune, 8 January 1863.

prescribed [sic] an entire religious class, some of whom are fighting in our ranks, the President deemed it necessary to revoke it.”<sup>347</sup>

Grant’s blunder did not significantly affect Lincoln’s opinion of the general, whom he summoned to Washington to receive his promotion and to consult about military strategy. On March 8, Grant arrived and called that evening at the White House, where a weekly public reception was in progress. Noah Brooks described him on that occasion as “rather slightly built,” with “stooping shoulders, mild blue eyes and light brown hair and whiskers, with a foxy tinge to his mustache. He has a frank, manly bearing, wears an ordinary-looking military suit, and doesn’t put on any airs whatever.” When Lincoln heard the crowd buzz, he knew Grant was on the premises and hurried to welcome him. The “crowd instinctively fell back, and Lincoln warmly clasped the hand of Grant in an impressive silence of some seconds’ duration.”

“This is General Grant, is it?” the president asked.

“Yes!”

The two men, who had not met before, greeted each other cordially, but, as Nicolay recorded, “with that modest deference – felt rather than expressed by word or action – so appropriate to both.” The crowd “partook of the feeling of the occasion – there was no rude jostling – or pushing or pulling, but unrestrained the circle kept its respectful distance.” Lincoln dispatched Nicolay to notify Stanton and asked Seward to introduce the honored guest to Mrs. Lincoln.<sup>348</sup> In the East Room, the general was cheered lustily. “There has never been such a coat-tearing, button-bursting jam in the

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<sup>347</sup> Halleck to Grant, Washington, 21 January 1863, Simon, ed., Grant Papers, 7:54; OR, I, 24, 1:9.

<sup>348</sup> Nicolay to Rene Bache, Washington, 19 April 1897, in Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 239.

White House,” one journalist reported, while another wrote that the “crowd was immense, and for once the interest was temporarily transferred from the President to the newcomer. The mass of people thronged about him wherever he moved, everybody being anxious to get at least a glimpse of his face. The women were caught up and whirled into the torrent which swept through the great East room; laces were torn, crinoline mashed, and things were generally much mixed. People mounted sofas and table to get out of harm’s way or to take observations, and for a time the commotion was almost like a Parisian emeute.”<sup>349</sup> In the East Room, Grant stood “blushing like a girl” on a crimson couch at Seward’s suggestion so that all could see him. But the crowd was not content with just a view of the general; they also had to shake his hand, which they did for the remaining hour of the reception.<sup>350</sup>

Afterwards the “scared-looking” Grant, “flushed, heated and perspiring from the unwonted exertion,” returned to the Blue Room, where Lincoln discussed with him the ceremony to be held next day.<sup>351</sup> “Tomorrow at such time as you may arrange with the Sec[retary] of War, I desire to make you a formal presentation of your commission as Lieut. Genl.” With characteristic thoughtfulness, the president tried to make the occasion as easy as possible for the rather shy Grant: “I shall then make a very short speech to you, to which I desire you to reply, for an object; and that you may be properly prepared to do so I have written what I shall say – only four sentences in all – which I will read from my MSS. As an example which you may follow and also read your reply, as you are perhaps

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<sup>349</sup> Washington correspondence, 8 March, New York Tribune, 9 March 1864; Washington correspondence, 9 March, Sacramento Daily Union, 9 April 1864, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 104.

<sup>350</sup> Nicolay memorandum, Washington, 8 March 1864, in Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 129-30.

<sup>351</sup> Nicolay to Rene Bache, Washington, 19 April 1897; Nicolay memorandum, Washington, 8 March 1864, Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 129, 239.

not as much accustomed to speaking as I myself – and I therefore give you what I shall say that you may consider it and form your reply.” In that reply, Lincoln asked the general to incorporate two points: “1<sup>st</sup>, To say something which shall prevent or obviate any jealousy of you from any of the other generals in the service, and secondly, something which shall put you on as good terms as possible with this Army of the Potomac. Now consider whether this may not be said to make it of some advantage; and if you see any objection whatever to doing it be under no restraint whatever in expressing that objection to the Secretary of War who will talk further with you about it.”<sup>352</sup> Upon leaving, the general told Lincoln: “This is a warmer campaign than I have witnessed during the war.”<sup>353</sup>

The next afternoon at the ceremony, Lincoln said to the general: “The nation’s appreciation of what you have done and its reliance upon you for what remains to do in the existing great struggle are now presented with this commission, constituting you lieutenant general in the Army of the United States. With his high honor devolves upon you also a corresponding responsibility. As the country herein trust you, so under God it will sustain you. I scarcely need to add that with what I here speak for the nation goes my own hearty personal concurrence.”<sup>354</sup>

Grant replied, reading awkwardly and hesitatingly from a note he had scribbled out in pencil: “Mr. President, I accept this commission with gratitude for the high honor conferred. With the aid of the noble armies that have fought on so many fields, it will be my earnest endeavor not to disappoint your expectations. I feel the full weight of the

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<sup>352</sup> Nicolay memorandum, Washington, 8 March 1864, in Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 130.

<sup>353</sup> Brooks, Lincoln and the Downfall of American Slavery, 387.

<sup>354</sup> Speech to Grant, [9 March 1864], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 7:234.



responsibilities now devolving on me and know if they are to be met it will be due to those armies, and above all to the favor of that Providence which leads both nations and men.”<sup>355</sup> The general was embarrassed by his poor delivery,” but despite that problem, William O. Stoddard reported that the event “was simple, manly, dignified,” worthy of the general and the president. There was no “pomp, no show, no vulgar ostentation.”<sup>356</sup>

After a quick visit to the Army of the Potomac, Grant returned to Washington briefly. When the president invited him to dinner, he declined saying: “a dinner to me means a million dollars a day lost to the country.”<sup>357</sup> He added: “I have become very tired of this show business.”<sup>358</sup> This response pleased Lincoln, who had encountered few officers willing to pass up such “show business” or who appreciated that the financial cost of the war must be taken into consideration.<sup>359</sup> He told the general that “he did not pretend to know anything about the art of war, and it was with the greatest reluctance that he ever interfered with the movements of army commanders, but he did know that celerity was absolutely necessary, that while armies were sitting down, waiting for opportunities which might perhaps be more favorable from a military point of view, the Government was spending millions of dollars every day, that there was a limit to the sinews of war, and there would come a time when the spirits and the resources of the people would become exhausted.”<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> Simpson, Grant, 261.

<sup>356</sup> Nicolay memorandum, Washington, 9 March 1864, Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 130; Washington correspondence, 14 March, New York Examiner, 17 March 1864, Michael Burlingame, ed., Dispatches from Lincoln's White House: The Anonymous Civil War Journalism of Presidential Secretary William O. Stoddard (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 217-18.

<sup>357</sup> John Russell Young quoted in the Chicago Tribune, 1 September 1885.

<sup>358</sup> Horace Porter, Campaigning with Grant (New York: Century, 1897), 22.

<sup>359</sup> Brooks, Lincoln and the Downfall of American Slavery, 388-89.

<sup>360</sup> Porter, Campaigning with Grant, 22, 26.

With Chase and Grant both out of the running, Lincoln still faced potential challenges from Benjamin Butler and John C. Frémont, both darlings of the German Radicals. When Missouri Germans attacked Lincoln publicly in May 1863, he said “there was evidently a serious misunderstanding springing up between him and the Germans of St. Louis, which he would like to see removed.” In responding to charges they made in formal resolutions, he told their emissary, James Taussig, that the shelved generals they so much admired – Frémont, Butler, and Sigel – were not “systematically kept out of command.” Those men “by their own action” had “placed themselves in the positions which they occupied” and “he was not only willing but anxious to place them again in command as soon as he could find spheres of action for them, without doing injustice to others,” but at that time “he had more pegs than holes to put them in.”<sup>361</sup>

Both Butler and Frémont were angling for the presidential nomination. The publicity-savvy Butler had managed to endear himself to Radicals despite his lack of military talent. His policy of dealing with refugee slaves as “contrabands” won Radical approval, as did his no-nonsense treatment of defiant New Orleans residents. (When women in the Crescent City insulted Union soldiers, he famously ordered that any such female “shall be regarded and held liable to be treated as a woman of the town plying her profession.” Confederates and Europeans misinterpreted this as a license for occupying troops to treat refined ladies as prostitutes, but many Northerners understood that Butler was merely trying to shame the contemptuous natives into behaving civilly. He also won plaudits for summarily executing a man who hauled down the American flag, tore it, and trampled on it.) When Lincoln recalled Butler from Louisiana in December 1862, the

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<sup>361</sup> James Taussig to members of a committee of Missouri Radicals, Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 9 June 1863.

general was lionized throughout the North. He spent eleven months at his Massachusetts home before receiving command of Fort Monroe.

One of Butler's champions, the abolitionist Charles Grandison Finney of Oberlin College, told Gerrit Smith in January: "We need a more radical man [than Lincoln] to finish up this war. I hope the radicals, in and out of Congress, will make their influence so felt in respect to the coming nomination that Mr. L. will see that there is no hope of his nomination and election unless he takes and keeps more radical ground. The people are prepared to elect the most radical abolitionist there is if he can get a nomination." Finney feared "that the radicals will so easily acquiesce in the nomination of Mr. Lincoln that he will get the impression that we are satisfied with his views and action."<sup>362</sup> Two months later, William P. Fessenden expressed a preference for Butler because "he seems to have exhibited from the start more proper sense of the crisis, more genius, more energetic ability, and more determination than any one."<sup>363</sup>

Some abolitionists had reservations about Butler. Lydia Maria Child thought he had "a great heart and noble impulses," but she doubted "whether his principles could be trusted in any slippery place." It would, she thought, "be a risk to change 'honest Abe' for him."<sup>364</sup>

Lincoln worried about Butler's potential candidacy. In November 1863, Horace White reported that he "has got his head full of the idea that the recent 'Missouri delegation' was a corrupt caucus to make Gen Butler the next President – a point on

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<sup>362</sup> Finney to Smith, 29 January 1864, in Ralph Volney Harlow, Gerrit Smith: Philanthropist and Reformer (New York: H. Holt, 1939), 439-40.

<sup>363</sup> Fessenden to his son Frank, Washington, 23 March 1864, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College; Fessenden to J. S. Pike, Washington, 9 March 1864, Pike Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>364</sup> Child to Charles Sumner, Wayland, Massachusetts, 31 July 1864, Sumner Papers, Harvard University.

which he is very sensitive.”<sup>365</sup> Five months later, Lincoln asked Thomas H. Ford, former lieutenant governor of Ohio, to sound out Butler. After making inquiries, Ford reported that a delegation from Senator Pomeroy’s Republican National Executive Committee, headed by the Rev. Mr. Robert McMurdy, had called on the general at Fort Monroe. To Lincoln’s relief, Butler “declined to enter into a combination with other candidates against the President,” though he would not “decline the use of his name for the office.”<sup>366</sup> Soon afterward, Lincoln expressed interest in accepting Butler’s invitation to visit Fort Monroe, but nothing came of it.<sup>367</sup> In May, when John Hay opined that “Butler was the only man in the army in whom power would be dangerous,” the president replied: “Yes, he is like Jim Jett’s brother. Jim used to say that his brother was the dam[n]dest scoundrel that ever lived but in the infinite mercy of Providence he was also the dam[n]dest fool.”<sup>368</sup> (Many years later, Butler claimed that Lincoln offered to make him his running mate, but his account is highly suspect.)<sup>369</sup>

With Butler’s declination, Radicals turned to Frémont, who deeply resented the administration’s treatment of him. In 1862, the abolitionist Moncure Conway proposed that Frémont replace Lincoln on the 1864 Republican ticket. In the spring of 1863, Frémont let it be known that he was interested in the presidential nomination. He also purchased a summer home in Massachusetts, where he and his extremely ambitious wife

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<sup>365</sup> Horace White to William P. Fessenden, Washington, 7 November 1863, Fessenden Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>366</sup> Ames, ed., Correspondence of Butler, 4:66; 3:675-676; E. D. Webster to Seward, 3, 9, 14 March 1864, Seward Papers, University of Rochester.

<sup>367</sup> Ames, ed., Correspondence of Butler, 4:9, 29; Lincoln to Butler, Washington, 6 April 1864, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 7:292.

<sup>368</sup> Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 197-98 (entry for 22 May 1864).

<sup>369</sup> Butler, “Vice-Presidential Politics in ’64,” North American Review 141 (October 1885): 331-35; Murray M. Horowitz, “Benjamin F. Butler: Seventeenth President?” Lincoln Herald 77 (1975):191-203.

cultivated Radicals.<sup>370</sup> One of them, Karl Heinzen, seconded Conway’s proposal in the columns of his newspaper, Der Pionier. Frémont had “saved the honor of the Republic” with his August 1861 emancipation order, Heinzen declared. Lincoln, on the other hand, was merely a “weak person, of average ability” who was “controlled by events which he did not foresee.”<sup>371</sup> Another Frémont enthusiast expressed reluctance “to trust the issues of the next four years to the namby-pamby weakness and negative conservatism of Mr Lincoln and his present advisers. I want to see a positive man in the White House, a Radical.”<sup>372</sup> That fall, a convention of anti-administration, pro-Frémont Germans met in Cleveland and adopted a platform endorsing the complete abolition of slavery, unconditional surrender of the Confederacy, treatment of the South as a conquered territory, redistribution of slave owners’ property to the slaves, support for European revolutionaries, and strict adherence to the Monroe Doctrine.<sup>373</sup> In February 1864, Congressman George Ashmun reported that the “friends of Fremont seem determined to run him at all events.”<sup>374</sup> Though some Republicans pooh-poohed the movement as “principally confined to the craziest portion of the infidel Dutch,” others joined it, including a band of New York Radicals who launched the Frémont Campaign Club on

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<sup>370</sup> William Frank Zornow, Lincoln & the Party Divided (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), 73; James M. McPherson, The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 264.

<sup>371</sup> Carl Wittke, Against the Current: The Life of Karl Heinzen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945), 189, 196.

<sup>372</sup> Sinclair Tousey to Gerrit Smith, New York, 25 March 1864, Smith Papers, Syracuse University.

<sup>373</sup> A copy of the platform, dated 20 October 1863, is enclosed in Charles Roeser to Chase, Washington, 1 November 1863, Chase Papers, Library of Congress. See also Wittke, Refugees of Revolution, 245-46; Wittke, Heinzen, 191; McPherson, Struggle for Equality, 265.

<sup>374</sup> Benjamin P. Thomas, Abraham Lincoln: A Biography (New York: Knopf, 1952), 424.

March 18 at Cooper Union.<sup>375</sup> After the attendees -- among them such abolitionist luminaries as Parker Pillsbury and George B. Cheever -- had adopted a platform condemning the “irresolute and feeble” policy of the Lincoln administration and calling for a “vigorous, consistent, concentrated prosecution of the war,” they were startled by the sudden entrance of Horace Greeley. The Tribune editor announced his support for a one-term limit on the presidency. He also recommended postponing the Republican national convention until it was clear what Grant’s summer campaign might yield. Finally, he declared that “the people of New York were in favor of putting down the rebellion and its cause, and sustaining Freedom” and that Fremont “would carry out such views.”<sup>376</sup> In the Tribune, Greeley conceded that Lincoln had merits but insisted “that they are not such as to eclipse and obscure those of all the statesmen and soldiers who have aided in the great work of saving the country from disruption and overthrow.”<sup>377</sup>

Most Republicans resisted the Pathfinder’s appeal. “Fremont would rather split the party as he does his hair in the middle than see Lincoln elected,” David Davis quipped.<sup>378</sup>

By the late spring, Lincoln believed that he had sewn up the nomination. When David Davis and Leonard Swett expressed anxiety about the convention, he assured them that there was no need to worry. But, he added, supposedly loyal delegates might not prove reliable. The situation reminded him of a story “about a man and a woman in the old days traveling up and down the country with a fiddle and a banjo making music for

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<sup>375</sup> John Defrees to Richard W. Thompson, Washington, 16 April 1864, Thompson Papers, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

<sup>376</sup> New York Tribune, 20 March 1864.

<sup>377</sup> Harlan Hoyt Horner, Lincoln and Greeley (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1953), 341-42.

<sup>378</sup> David Davis to W. W. Orme, 29 March 1864, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

their living. And the man was proud of his wife's virtue and was always saying that no man could get to her, and he would trust her with any man who wanted to try it on a bet. And he made a bet with a stranger one day and the stranger took the wife into a room while the husband stood outside the door and played his fiddle. For quite a while he stood there playing his fiddle, and at last sang a song to her asking how she was coming along with the stranger." She replied with a song of her own:

“He's got me down,  
He's clasped me round the middle;  
Kiss my ass and go to hell;  
Be off with your damned old fiddle.”

An angry Davis scolded Lincoln: “if the country knew you were telling those stories, you could never be elected and you know it.” In reply, the president just laughed.<sup>379</sup>

Lincoln's opponents on the left might not be able to stop his renomination, but they could launch a third party and run Frémont as their standard bearer. Even if the Pathfinder was unable to win outright, some Radicals hoped his candidacy would throw the election into the House of Representatives and thus deny Lincoln a second term.<sup>380</sup> The feminist leader Elizabeth Cady Stanton favored dumping Lincoln because he “has proved his incapacity for the great responsibilities of his position.” Dismissively she declared: “I say Butler or Fremont or some man on their platform for the next President & let Abe finish up his jokes in Springfield. We have had enough of ‘Nero fiddling in

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<sup>379</sup> Carl Sandburg's notes of an interview with Joseph Fifer, [1923], Sandburg-Barrett Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago. Swett was Fifer's informant.

<sup>380</sup> George B. Cheever to Theodore Tilton, Newport, R.I., n.d. [1864], Tilton Papers, New-York Historical Society.

Rome’ in times like these, when the nation groans in sorrow, & mothers mourn for their first born.”<sup>381</sup> She objected to Lincoln’s appearance as well as his sense of humor.<sup>382</sup>

Other feminist-abolitionists agreed. One of them, the young Quaker firebrand Anna E. Dickinson, had publicly denounced Lincoln for being “not so far from . . . a slave-catcher after all” and privately called him “an Ass . . . for the Slave Power to ride.” In 1864, she deemed him “the wisest scoundrel in the country” and announced that “I would rather lose all the reputation I possess & sell apples & peanuts on the street, than say aught, that would gain a vote for him.”<sup>383</sup> In the early spring of that year, she visited the White House to urge more vigorous enforcement of the Emancipation Proclamation. She later told an audience in Boston that Lincoln tried to divert her with a story, which she interrupted, saying: “I didn’t come to hear stories. I can read better ones in the papers any day than you can tell me.” Her host then showed Dickinson some letters about events in Louisiana. When asked her opinion of the administration’s reconstruction policy, she declared it “all wrong; as radically bad as can be.” She alleged that Lincoln replied to this criticism with some compliments for his attractive young caller and closed with a piece of advice: “If the radicals want me to lead, let them get out of the way and let me lead.” Indignantly she told a friend, “I have spoken my last word to President Lincoln.” As she related this tale in Boston, she belittled Lincoln’s appearance, particularly “his old coat, out at the elbows[,] which look[ed] as if he had worn it three years and used it as a pen

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<sup>381</sup> Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Lydia Maria Child, New York, [ca. 22 April 1864] in Ann D. Gordon, ed., The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony (4 vols.; New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997-2006), 1:514.

<sup>382</sup> Henry C. Wright to William Lloyd Garrison, Valley Falls, 8 May 1864, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

<sup>383</sup> Washington correspondence, 17 January, New York Evening Post, 18 January 1864; McPherson, Struggle for Equality, 108; Dickinson to [Elizabeth Cady Stanton], Philadelphia, 12 July 1864, Huntington Library, quoted in J. Matthew Gallman, America’s Joan of Arc: The Life of Anna Elizabeth Dickinson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 40-41.



wiper.” She also had unkind words for his “stocking limp and soiled.”<sup>384</sup> At least one member of the audience thought her comments about the president “in the worst possible taste.”<sup>385</sup>

The abolitionist J. Miller McKim, who had been a mentor to Dickinson, thought her “desire to do what is right is strong, but her desire for distinction is enormous.” He heard from Congressman William D. Kelley a different version of this interview. According to Kelley, who was present during the conversation, she said very little, being “more a witness” than a participant. “What she did say was ‘fool’ish according to her own acknowledgment at the time. She burst into tears – struck an attitude and begged Mr. L. to excuse her for coming there to make a fool of herself.” Lincoln “was paternally kind and considerate in what he said to her.” In discussing affairs in Louisiana, Kelley objected to General Banks’ decision to hold a constitutional convention after the election of state officers. That approach, Kelley thought, was less likely to promote the cause of black citizenship rights. Lincoln acknowledged that others agreed with the congressman’s views and “that a powerful argument could be made in favor” of them. But as things stood, he thought Banks’ plan preferable. As for black citizenship rights, Lincoln predicted: “That must come soon. It must come pretty soon, and will.” Kelley told McKim: “It pleased me to know that the President had firmly stipulated for a free state and that he saw the coming of Negro suffrage in Louisiana. That interview helped me to the conclusion in which I abide, that ‘Abraham Lincoln is the wisest radical of us all.’”<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> Boston Daily Courier, 28 April 1864.

<sup>385</sup> Gallman, Dickinson, 39.

<sup>386</sup> McKim to Samuel J. May, Jr., Philadelphia, 6 May 1863, Samuel J. May Anti-Slavery Manuscript Collection, Cornell University; McKim to William Lloyd Garrison, Washington, [9?] May [1864], Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library; Kelley to McKim, Washington, 1 May 1864, copy enclosed in McKim to Garrison, Philadelphia, 3 May 1864, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

In April, Dickinson's friend Whitelaw Reid urged her to temper her criticism of the president: "It can do no good now for you to get tangled in the strifes of personal politics, & it may do much harm. Mr. Lincoln's popularity with the masses is established, – by what means it no longer does good to inquire, – & attacks on him only serve to inflame the ardor of his friends." Radical denunciation of the president might backfire "by driving him to the Democratic & Blair parties for support."<sup>387</sup>

Some Radicals objected to Frémont. Summarizing their case, George W. Smalley argued that while the Pathfinder might be "able & personally as honest as most public men," yet he was also "vain & selfish," the "worst judge of men in America," "surrounded by swindlers," a "weak man, sure to be a tool in others' hands," and "habitually a libertine" who had "seduced a governess in his own family."<sup>388</sup>

On May 4, a self-styled "people's provisional committee" issued a call for a national convention to meet in Cleveland at the end of the month, one week before the Republicans gathered at Baltimore. Endorsing the movement were several abolitionists, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, William Goodell, Susan B. Anthony, George and Henry Cheever, and Wendell Phillips, who complained that "Old Abe is more cunning & slow than ever" and "evidently wishes to save slaveholders as much loss & trouble as he can." The celebrated orator thought that most voters "would take Lincoln if he'd announce a policy, still more if he'd change his cabinet," for such moves "would indicate a man. But he is I think no believer in the negro as a citizen – is indeed a colonizationist

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<sup>387</sup> Whitelaw Reid to Anna E. Dickinson, Washington, 3 April 1864, Dickinson Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>388</sup> George W. Smalley to Wendell Phillips, New York, 15 March 1864, Phillips Papers, Harvard University, in Irving H. Bartlett, ed., Wendell and Ann Phillips: The Community of Reform, 1840-1880 (New York: Norton, 1979), 188-91.

yet – use the negro & be rid of him.” The president “wishes to benefit the negro as much as he can & yet let the white race down gently – do them as little harm or change as possible. This is his first care – the negro his second.”<sup>389</sup> (When Phillips charged that the truth of Chase’s “Anti-Slavery life was tested and proved base metal,” the treasury secretary’s defenders aptly called Phillips “the Boston Thersites” and a “common scold” with whom “the world has been all wrong from the beginning” and who “aspires to the unenviable distinction of scolding it into good behavior.”)<sup>390</sup> Other signatories were Missouri’s Senator B. Gratz Brown and some German Radicals, among them Caspar Butz, who called Lincoln “the weakest and worst man that ever filled the Presidential chair.”<sup>391</sup> Privately, influential Republicans like David Dudley Field as well as Governors Andrew G. Curtin and John A. Andrew supported Frémont. Andrew complained that “the administration lacks coherence, method, purpose, and consistency.”<sup>392</sup>

In signing the Cleveland call, Frederick Douglass explained that he supported “the complete abolition of every vestige, form and modification of Slavery in every part of the United States, perfect equality for the black man in every State before the law, in the jury box, at the ballot-box and on the battle-field: ample and salutary retaliation for every instance of enslavement or slaughter of prisoners of color.” He also insisted “that in the distribution of offices and honors under this Government no discrimination shall be made

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<sup>389</sup> Phillips to Moncure D. Conway, n.p., 16 March 1864, Conway Papers, Columbia University.

<sup>390</sup> Wendell Phillips’ speech in Cooper Union, 22 December 1863, New York Times, 23 December 1863; Ohio State Journal (Columbus), 31 December 1863.

<sup>391</sup> Carl Wittke, Refugees of Revolution: The German Forty-Eighters in America (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1952), 246.

<sup>392</sup> Andrew to John Murray Forbes, n.p., n.d., in Hughes, ed., Forbes Letters, 2:122.

in favor or against any class of citizens, whether black or white, of native or foreign birth.”<sup>393</sup>

Not all black abolitionists agreed with Douglass. Just before the Cleveland convention met, John Mercer Langston of Oberlin, Ohio, said Lincoln was “cautious and for that reason he was the man of the hour. His head and his heart were right.” Langston thanked God for the president’s leadership.<sup>394</sup>

Few attended the Cleveland convention held to launch the new “Radical Democratic Party.” When informed that the delegate total was no more than 400, Lincoln was reminded of an Old Testament passage describing the supporters of David at the cave of Adullam: “And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him, and he became a captain over them, and there were with him about four hundred men.”<sup>395</sup>

Wendell Phillips was not among the 400, but he wrote a letter that was read to the wildly approving assemblage. In it he excoriated the Lincoln administration, calling it “a civil and military failure” and predicting that if the incumbent were reelected, “I do not expect to see the Union reconstructed in my day, unless on terms more disastrous to liberty than even Disunion would be.” The president’s approach to Reconstruction, Phillips charged, “puts all power into the hands of the unchanged white race, soured by defeat, hating the laboring class, plotting constantly for aristocratic institutions.” Lincoln’s scheme “makes the freedom of the negro a sham, and perpetuates slavery under

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<sup>393</sup> Frederick Douglass to E. Gilbert, Rochester, 23 May 1864, New York Times, 27 May 1864.

<sup>394</sup> William Cheek and Aimee Lee Cheek, John Mercer Langston and the Fight for Black Freedom, 1829-65 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 424.

<sup>395</sup> Francis B. Carpenter, The Inner Life of Abraham Lincoln: Six Months at the White House (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1867), 220-221. The passage comes from I Samuel, 22:2.

a softer name.” The convention should “demand a reconstruction of States as speedily as possible, on the basis of every loyal man, white or black, sharing the land and the ballot.” In stark contrast to Lincoln, Phillips asserted, stood Frémont, “whose first act was to use the freedom of the negro as his weapon . . . whose thorough loyalty to democratic institutions, without regard to race – whose earnest and decisive character, whose clear-sighted statesmanship and rare military ability, justify my confidence that in his hands all will be done to save the state that foresight, skill, decision and statesmanship can do.”<sup>396</sup>

The delegates shared Phillips’ enthusiasm for the Pathfinder, who won the nomination handily, but they ignored his advice regarding the platform; both black suffrage and land redistribution to freedmen were glossed over in vague language about “equality before the law.” The convention did, however, endorse the proposed thirteenth amendment to the Constitution abolishing slavery nationwide. That measure had been vigorously debated in Congress over the preceding months, easily passing the senate in April but failing to gain the necessary two-thirds vote in the House.<sup>397</sup>

In his acceptance letter, Frémont attacked the Lincoln administration: “The ordinary rights secured under the Constitution and extraordinary powers have been usurped by the Executive.” Today, he averred, “we have in this country the abuses of a military dictation without its unity of action and vigor of execution.” He endorsed all planks of the radical platform save the one calling for the confiscation and redistribution of Rebels’ property “among the soldiers and settlers.”<sup>398</sup>

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<sup>396</sup> Oscar Sherwin, Prophet of Liberty: The Life and Times of Wendell Phillips (New York: Bookman Associates, 1958), 493; Irving H. Bartlett, Wendell Phillips: Brahmin Radical (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 269; McPherson, Struggle for Equality, 270.

<sup>397</sup> Vorenberg, Final Freedom, 53-140.

<sup>398</sup> Frémont to Worthington G. Snethen et al., New York, 4 June 1864, New York Daily News, 6 June 1864.

Frémont’s acceptance letter “killed him dead,” according to a Chase partisan.<sup>399</sup> It so angered George William Curtis that he exclaimed: “Poor Fremont! What a shadow and a sham he is!”<sup>400</sup> (That acceptance letter seemed like a bid for the Democratic nomination, for it emphasized standard Copperhead charges and said nothing about citizenship rights for blacks. Also disturbing was a platform plank condemning Lincoln’s suspension of habeas corpus, for that too smacked too much of Copperheadism.)<sup>401</sup> Franklin B. Sanborn thought Frémont’s letter “has taken ground much worse than Lincoln’s.” In Sanborn’s view, the Pathfinder had “committed fello de se.”<sup>402</sup> When Samuel May learned that Stephen Foster praised the letter as “just what we want,” he exclaimed in disgust: “Well, it is certainly instructive, to find out at last, after the throes and travails of so many years on the part of our friend Stephen & his special associates, ‘just what he wants.’ What a dizzy height of moral grandeur!”<sup>403</sup> Lucy Stone had “expected the largest antislavery utterance” from Frémont but was disappointed that his acceptance letter contained only a simple “announcement that slavery is dead.”<sup>404</sup>

Some other Radicals found the proceedings unsatisfactory, especially the nomination of Frémont’s running mate, John Cochrane, who had regularly voted for Democratic presidential candidates and was, according to the editor of the National Anti-

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<sup>399</sup> Simeon Nash to Chase, Gallipolis, Ohio, 10 June 1864, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>400</sup> Curtis to Daniel Ricketson, North Shore, New York, 30 June 1864, Curtis Papers, Harvard University.

<sup>401</sup> McPherson, The Struggle for Equality, 270.

<sup>402</sup> Franklin B. Sanborn to Moncure D. Conway, Pepperell, Massachusetts, 20 June 1864, Conway Family Papers, Dickinson College.

<sup>403</sup> Samuel May, Jr., to Garrison, Lexington, Mass., [27?] June 1864, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

<sup>404</sup> Lucy Stone to Susan B. Anthony, 12 July 1864, Blackwell Papers, Library of Congress, in Wendy Hamand Venet, Neither Ballots Nor Bullets: Women Abolitionists and the Civil War (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1991), 140-41.

Slavery Standard, a man “without a drop of anti-slavery blood in his veins” and “whose life has been one long chapter of intrigue.”<sup>405</sup> (Commenting on the many office-holders attending the Cleveland convention, Lincoln said of Cochrane that he had been awarded his general’s stars “not for his merits but his brass.”)<sup>406</sup> Lucy Stone objected strenuously to the Cleveland convention’s selection of Cochrane for vice-president, wondering how a man who voted for Franklin Pierce, James Buchanan, and John C. Breckinridge could possibly be considered a true abolitionist.<sup>407</sup>

The abolitionist Giles B. Stebbins reported from Detroit that “the resolve of the Cleveland Convention for ‘equal rights for all’ is looked upon as vague, and of no meaning. That Convention has no moral power.”<sup>408</sup> The Republican national committee rejected the attempt to have their nominating convention postponed for two months.

William Lloyd Garrison disagreed with Lincoln’s critics and opposed the Frémont movement. While Phillips denounced the president “a half-converted, honest Western Whig, trying to be an abolitionist,” Garrison insisted that Lincoln be judged on the basis “of his possibilities, rather than by our wishes, or by the highest abstract moral standard.”<sup>409</sup> Phillips retorted that “the Administration has never yet acknowledged the manhood of the negro.”<sup>410</sup> At a meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society in

<sup>405</sup> National Anti-Slavery Standard (New York), 18 June 1864.

<sup>406</sup> Washington correspondence, 30 May, New York Daily News, 2 June 1864.

<sup>407</sup> Lucy Stone to Susan B. Anthony, 12 July 1864, in Blackwell Papers, Library of Congress, in Venet, Neither Ballots Nor Bullets, 140-41.

<sup>408</sup> Stebbins to Garrison, 22 July 1864, The Liberator (Boston), in Robert H. Abzug and Stephen E. Maizlish, eds., New Perspectives on Race and Slavery in America: Essays in Honor of Kenneth M. Stampp (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1986), 78.

<sup>409</sup> Henry Mayer, All On Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery (New York: St. Martin’s, 1998), 562, 563.

<sup>410</sup> Walter M. Merrill, ed., The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971-81), 5:181.

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January, Phillips succeeded in having a bitter anti-Lincoln resolution adopted over Garrison's protest: "the government, in its haste, is ready to sacrifice the interest and honor of the North to secure a sham peace . . . leaving the freedmen and the Southern States under the control of the late slaveholders." In support of this claim, Phillips acknowledged that Lincoln deserved credit for issuing the Emancipation Proclamation but insisted that blacks needed more than the administration was willing to give. "There stands the black man, naked, homeless; he does not own a handful of dust; he has no education; he has no roof to shelter him." The president, Phillips charged, has "no desire, no purpose, no thought, to lift the freed negro to a higher status, social or political, than that of a mere labourer, superintended by others." The present government "was knowingly preparing for a peace in disregard of the negro." Its unwillingness to treat black troops as the equal of whites proves "that the Government is ready for terms which ignore the rights of the negro." The Emancipation Proclamation merely provided "technical liberty" which was "no better than apprenticeship. Equality is our claim, but it is not within the intention of the Government to grant it to the freedmen." Therefore, Phillips concluded, "I cannot trust the Government."<sup>411</sup> Abolitionists, he complained, got nothing from Lincoln "except by pressure. We have constantly to be pushing him from behind."<sup>412</sup>

Two months later, in a widely reprinted editorial, Garrison called Lincoln's reelection essential for "the suppression of the rebellion, and the abolition of slavery." The editor acknowledged that the president was "open to criticism and censure" but

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<sup>411</sup> McPherson, Struggle for Equality, 260-61.

<sup>412</sup> Auguste Laugel, The United States During the War (New York: Baillière Brothers, 1866), 299 (diary entry for 13 September 1864).



added that there “is also much to rejoice over and to be thankful for; and a thousand incidental errors and blunders are easily to be borne with on the part of one who, at one blow, severed the chains of three millions three hundred thousand slaves, – thus virtually abolishing the whole slave system . . . as an act dictated alike the patriotism, justice and humanity.”<sup>413</sup> Garrison counseled abolitionists to understand the constitutional and political constraints which Lincoln had to deal with: “His freedom to follow his convictions of duty as an individual is one thing – as the President of the United States, it is limited by the functions of his office; for the people do not elect a President to play the part of reformer or philanthropist, nor to enforce upon the nation his own peculiar ethical or humanity ideas, without regard to his oath or their will. His primary and all-comprehensive duty is to maintain the Union and execute the Constitution, in good faith . . . without reference to the views of any clique or party in the land.” Garrison expressed his “firm conviction” that “no man has occupied the chair of the Chief Magistracy in America, who has more assiduously or more honestly endeavored to discharge all its duties with a single eye to the welfare of the country, than Mr. Lincoln.”<sup>414</sup> In September, Garrison told a guest: “I have every confidence in Mr. Lincoln’s honesty; his honor is involved in his fidelity to the Emancipation Proclamation.”<sup>415</sup> He expressed the same sentiments to the president: “God save you, and bless you abundantly! As an instrument in his hands, you have done a mighty work for the freedom of the millions who have so long pined in bondage in our land – nay, for the freedom of all mankind. I have the

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<sup>413</sup> The Liberator (Boston), 18 March 1864.

<sup>414</sup> Merrill, ed., Garrison Letters, 5:180.

<sup>415</sup> Laugel, United States During the War, 302 (diary entry for 24 September 1864).

utmost faith in the benevolence of your heart, the purity of your motives, and the integrity of your spirit. This I do not hesitate to avow at all times.”<sup>416</sup>

When a long-time reader of The Liberator angrily cancelled his subscription and denounced the editor for deserting the abolitionist cause, Garrison replied that if supporting the candidacy of Lincoln “makes us recreant to anti-slavery principles,” then Owen Lovejoy, Joshua Giddings, Gerrit Smith “and a host of others long conspicuous for their consecration to the abolitionist cause are recreant.” If the president had also been recreant, Garrison asked, “how does it happen that not a rebel in all the South, nor a Copperhead in all the North, is aware of the fact? – that their malignant hatred of him, avowedly for no other reason than that he is determined upon the extermination of slavery, and is ‘a black-hearted abolitionist’? – that the one great issue to be met at the ballot-box in November is, whether the President’s emancipation policy shall stand or be repudiated?”<sup>417</sup>

To an English critic who denounced Lincoln as a hopeless bigot who was laboring under the delusion “that he has sworn to support slavery for the rebels,” Garrison conceded that the president “might have done more and gone further, if he had had greater resolution and larger foresight; that is an open question, and opinions are not facts. Possibly he could not have gone one hair’s breadth beyond the point he has reached by a slow and painful process, without inciting civil war at the North, and overturning the government.” Such speculation, Garrison rightly noted, was “idle.” Instead, he listed what could be known, not guessed: “that his Emancipation proclamation of January 1,

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<sup>416</sup> Garrison to Lincoln, Boston, 13 February 1865, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>417</sup> The Liberator (Boston), n.d., copied in the National Anti-Slavery Standard (New York), 3 September 1864.

1863, liberated more than three-fourths of the entire slave population; that since that period, emancipation has followed in Maryland, Western Virginia, Missouri, and the District of Columbia, and is being rapidly consummated in Kentucky and Tennessee, thus terminating the holding of property in man everywhere under the American flag; that all the vast Territories have been consecrated to freedom and free labor; that all Fugitive Slave laws have been repealed, so that slave-hunting is at an end in all the free States; that no rebel State can be admitted to the Union, except on the basis of complete emancipation; that national justice (refused under every other Administration) has been done to the republics of Hayti and Liberia, by the full recognition of their independence; that an equitable treaty has been made with Great Britain for the effectual suppression of the foreign slave trade, through right of search; that a large portion of the army is made up of those who, until now, have been prohibited bearing arms, and refused enrolment in the militia of every State in the Union [i.e., blacks]; . . . that free negro schools are following wherever the army penetrates, and multitudes of young and old, who, under the old slave system, were prohibited learning the alphabet, are now rapidly acquiring that knowledge which is power, and which makes slavery and serfdom alike impracticable; and that on numerous plantations free labor is ‘in the full tide of successful experiment.’”<sup>418</sup>

Garrison’s endorsement, according to the Philadelphia Press, proved conclusively “that the President is not the candidate of the weak, semi-pro-slavery conservative faction.”<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>418</sup> The Liberator (Boston), n.d., copied in the National Anti-Slavery Standard (New York), 8 October 1864.

<sup>419</sup> Philadelphia Press, 17 March 1864, in McPherson, Struggle for Equality, 266.

Seconding Garrison, Owen Lovejoy told him that if Lincoln was not “the best conceivable president,” he was nonetheless “the best possible. I have known something of the facts inside during his administration, and I know that he has been just as radical as any of his Cabinet. And although he does not do everything that you or I would like, the question recurs, whether it is likely we can elect a man who would.”<sup>420</sup> Lovejoy thought it “impolitic, not to say cruel, to sharply criticize even the mistakes of an executive weighed down and surrounded with cares and perplexities, such as have fallen to but few of those upon whom have been laid the affairs of Government.”<sup>421</sup> Publicly he implored his fellow Radicals: “Do not let any power from earth or from beneath the earth alienate your attachment or weaken your confidence in the President. He has given us the Proclamation of Freedom. He has solemnly declared he will not revoke it. And although he may seem to lead the Isaac of freedom bound to the altar, you may rest assured that it is done from a conviction of duty, and that the sacrificial knife will never fall on the lad.”<sup>422</sup> In February, Lovejoy warned that attempts to divide the Republican party were “criminal in the last degree.” Radical critics of Lincoln should realize that he “is at heart as strong an anti-slavery man as any of them,” but he “has a responsibility in this matter which many men do not seem to be able to comprehend.” Lovejoy conceded that the president’s “mind works slowly,” but added that “when he moves, it is forward.” Indignantly the congressman told a friend, “I have no sympathy or patience with those who are trying to manufacture issues against him; but they will not succeed; he is too

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<sup>420</sup> Lovejoy to Garrison, 22 February 1864, The Liberator (Boston), n.d., copied in the Ohio State Journal (Columbus), 8 April 1864.

<sup>421</sup> Owen Lovejoy, His Brother’s Blood: Speeches and Writings, 1838-64, ed. William F. Moore and Jane Ann Moore (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 380.

<sup>422</sup> Moore and Moore, eds., Lovejoy Speeches, 389.

strong with the masses. For my part, I am not only willing to take Mr. Lincoln for another term, but the same cabinet, straight through.”<sup>423</sup>

The Washington correspondent of the National Anti-Slavery Standard judged that Lincoln’s antislavery policy “has been a wise one, for he has drawn many conservatives after him who would have been shocked by any sudden radical action upon his part.”<sup>424</sup> The editor of that newspaper, Oliver Johnson, denounced the Cleveland movement as “an ally of Jeff. Davis” and called Frémont “a scoundrel, in alliance with the corrupt leaders of the Copperhead Democracy to divide the loyal voters of the country in the Presidential election.” Johnson added that the feeble antislavery plank of the Cleveland platform was “Homeopathic,” while its “Copperheadism” was “conspicuous and emphatic,” as were the “letters of its candidates, which are an open bid for the nomination at Chicago.” He wondered what “delusion” had overcome such radical abolitionists as William Goodell, George B. Cheever, and Cheever’s brother Henry.<sup>425</sup> William Lloyd Garrison’s close ally, Henry C. Wright, deplored “the spirit of bitterness” that was “entering into & controlling the whole being of some of our old Abolitionists.”<sup>426</sup>

Lydia Maria Child, who regarded Frémont as “a selfish unprincipled adventurer,” acknowledged that Lincoln was “a man of slow mind, apparently incapable of large, comprehensive view,” and that he was inclined “to potter about details” and thus waste

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<sup>423</sup> Carpenter, Six Months at the White House, 47-48.

<sup>424</sup> Washington correspondence, 19 October, National Anti-Slavery Standard (New York), 23 October 1863.

<sup>425</sup> Oliver Johnson to Henry T. Cheever, Philadelphia, 16 June 1864, Cheever Family Papers, American Antiquarian Society.

<sup>426</sup> Henry C. Wright to William L. Garrison, Valley Falls, 8 May 1864, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

“valuable time and golden opportunities.” Still, the president “is an honest man, and conscientiously hates Slavery,” even though he “obviously lacks sympathy for the wrongs and sufferings of the colored race” and “his fear of God is unfortunately secondary to his fear of the Democratic Party.” Besides, she asked rhetorically: “Who is there that would be better, except Charles Sumner? and he would not be available for a candidate.”<sup>427</sup> She concluded that Lincoln’s slowness, though exasperating, “may be, in a great measure excused by the unparalleled difficulty of his situation.”<sup>428</sup>

Other female abolitionists agreed with Child. Lucy Stone told Susan B. Anthony: “bad as Mr. Lincoln is, a union with him and his supporters, seems to me less bad than a union with peace Democrats.”<sup>429</sup> (Stone failed to convince Anthony, who enthusiastically backed the Pathfinder.) Elizabeth Buffum Chace confessed that “impatient as I have been with Lincoln for his slowness of perception as to the needs of the hour; yet, since the best sentiment of the people is carrying him with it toward freedom and justice and peace, I had certainly as lief trust him as another man who has not been tried.”<sup>430</sup> Lucretia Mott averred that “we must admit that Lincoln has done well, for him,” and doubted “if one could have been elected, who wd. have done more.”<sup>431</sup> Abby Hopper Gibbons called the president “a just and cautious man” who was “slow to move, but when ready, [was] sure

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<sup>427</sup> Child to Gerrit Smith, Wayland, 23 July 1864, Lydia Maria Child: Selected Letters, 1817-1880, ed. Milton Meltzer and Patricia G. Holland (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), 445; Child to John Greenleaf Whittier, Wayland, Massachusetts, 3 July 1864, Child Papers, Library of Congress; Child to Charles Sumner, Wayland, Massachusetts, 31 July 1864, Sumner Papers, Harvard University.

<sup>428</sup> Lydia Maria Child to Sarah Blake Sturgis Shaw, Wayland, Massachusetts, [May-June?] 1864, Child Correspondence, microfiche ed., comp. Patricia G. Holland and Milton Meltzer.

<sup>429</sup> Lucy Stone to Susan B. Anthony, 12 July 1864, Blackwell Papers, Library of Congress, in Venet, Neither Ballots Nor Bullets, 140-41.

<sup>430</sup> Elizabeth Buffum Chace to Garrison, Valley Falls, 5 May 1864, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

<sup>431</sup> Mott to Martha Coffin Wright et al., Philadelphia, 25 January 1864, in Beverly Wilson Palmer, ed., Selected Letters of Lucretia Coffin Mott (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 338.

to take the right direction.”<sup>432</sup> Maria Weston Chapman preferred Lincoln to any other likely candidate “because, to a progressive domestic policy, he adds a friendly foreign one.”<sup>433</sup>

Some Democrats hoped to ally with the Radical Republicans. Such disparate elements could, according to a Democratic leader in New York, unite both in “opposition to the enormous frauds” tolerated by the Lincoln administration “and to the gross infringements upon the constitutional rights of Citizens & of the press at the North.”<sup>434</sup>

In response to his numerous critics, Wendell Phillips maintained that the Cleveland Convention’s platform, with its demand for black citizenship rights including suffrage, was infinitely preferable to what the Republicans offered. Acknowledging that Lincoln would be renominated, he argued that Radicals should press him to change his policies.<sup>435</sup> Though reluctant to criticize Phillips, Theodore Tilton called his arguments naïve: “Now, we would be glad if a great political party could go before the country on the high issue of giving every black man a vote. But the country is not ready for such an issue.”<sup>436</sup> Agreeing was a Chase enthusiast in Ohio, who warned that “[h]atred to rebels has made thousands eager to abolish slavery, but no one is the less prejudiced against negro social equality. On any such issue, the party advocating it would be crushed out for

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<sup>432</sup> Journal of Abby Hooper Gibbons, 20 February 1862, in Sarah Hopper Emerson, ed., Life of Abby Hopper Gibbons, Told Chiefly Through Her Correspondence (2 vols.; New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1896-97), 1:348.

<sup>433</sup> Maria Weston Chapman to Lizzie Chapman Laugel, Weymouth, 23 February 1864, Weston Sisters Papers, Boston Public Library.

<sup>434</sup> Amasa J. Parker to Samuel J. Tilden, Albany, 7 July 1864, Tilden Papers, New York Public Library.

<sup>435</sup> On June 2, Phillips told this to Franklin B. Sanborn. Sanborn to Moncure D. Conway, Springfield, Massachusetts, 3 June 1864, Conway Family Papers, Dickinson College.

<sup>436</sup> The Independent (New York), 29 June 1864; Tilton to Garrison, New York, 30 June 1864, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

years.” The “love and zeal for the nigger may be carried too far.”<sup>437</sup> Oliver Johnson was “deeply pained” that Wendell Phillips had “become the partizan of Fremont in his efforts to win support from the Copperhead Democracy.” He predicted that the “consequences to himself will be fearful.”<sup>438</sup> Lydia Maria Child was also “exceedingly sorry” that Phillips supported the Pathfinder. “Since Fremont has written a letter, so obviously courting the Copperheads, I don’t see how he can stand by him,” she remarked. “I should think the comparison between his letter and the letters of honest Abe and Andy Johnson, would put him to his thoughts.”<sup>439</sup> She condemned Frémont for dividing the Republicans merely “to gratify his own personal ambition, or personal pique.”<sup>440</sup> During the war, he “certainly has not played a noble, manly part. His course has been miserably small and selfish.”<sup>441</sup> Maria Weston Chapman predicted that “Wendell’s labor against Lincoln will procure more votes for him than it will deprive him of.”<sup>442</sup>

#### RENOMINATION: THE BALTIMORE CONVENTION

To undercut Frémont’s appeal, Lincoln bolstered the Republican party’s antislavery bona fides by endorsing a constitutional amendment outlawing slavery. He told Noah Brooks that he hoped the delegates would support such an amendment “as one

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<sup>437</sup> Simeon Nash to Chase, Gallipolis, Ohio, 10 June 1864, Chase Papers, Library of Congress; Nash to John Sherman, Gallipolis, Ohio, 17 June 1864, Sherman Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>438</sup> Oliver Johnson to Garrison, New York, 23 June 1864, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

<sup>439</sup> Child to John Greenleaf Whittier, 19 June 1864, in John Albree, ed., Whittier Correspondence from the Oak Knoll Collections, 1830-1892 (Salem, Massachusetts: Essex Book and Print Club, 1911), 147.

<sup>440</sup> Lydia Maria Child to Sarah Blake Sturgis Shaw, Wayland, Massachusetts, [May-June?] 1864, Child Correspondence, microfiche ed., Holland and Meltzer, eds.

<sup>441</sup> Lydia Maria Child to John Greenleaf Whittier, Wayland, Massachusetts, 3 July 1864, Child Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>442</sup> Maria Weston Chapman to Lizzie Chapman Laugel, Weymouth, Massachusetts, 23 February 1864, Weston Sisters Papers, Boston Public Library.



of the articles of the party faith.”<sup>443</sup> A few days before the convention, the party chairman, New York Senator Edwin D. Morgan, called at the White House, where the president urged him to make an antislavery amendment the keynote of his opening speech at the convention.<sup>444</sup> Morgan took the president’s advice, warning delegates that the party would “fall far short of accomplishing its great mission, unless among its other resolves it shall declare for such an amendment of the Constitution as will positively prohibit African slavery in the United States.”<sup>445</sup> Obediently the platform committee included a plank declaring “That as Slavery was the cause, and now constitutes the strength, of this Rebellion, and as it must be, always and everywhere, hostile to the principles of Republican Government, justice and the National safety demand its utter and complete extirpation from the soil of the Republic – and that while we uphold and maintain the acts and proclamations by which the Government, in its own defense, has aimed a death-blow at this gigantic evil, we are in favor, furthermore, of such an amendment to the Constitution, to be made by the people in conformity with its provisions, as shall terminate and forever prohibit the existence of slavery within the limits or the jurisdiction of the United States.”<sup>446</sup> When introduced, it “caught the convention as it were around the waist and flung it into the sea of enthusiasm.”<sup>447</sup> Delegates leapt from their seats, waved their hats, applauded tumultuously, and adopted the resolution without dissent. This move stole some thunder from the Radical

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<sup>443</sup> Brooks, Washington in Lincoln’s Time, ed. Mitgang, 141-42.

<sup>444</sup> A few days after this conversation with Morgan, Lincoln described it to Theodore Tilton. New York Independent, 16 June 1864.

<sup>445</sup> Rawley, Morgan, 199.

<sup>446</sup> U. F. Murphy, Presidential Election, 1864: Proceedings of the National Union Convention Baltimore, Md., June 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> 1864 (New York: Baker & Godwin, 1864), 4.

<sup>447</sup> New York Tribune quoted in Francis Brown, Raymond of the Times (New York: Norton, 1951), 254.

Democracy, but Lincoln did not suggest that his party support the Cleveland convention's demand that blacks be accorded equal rights, nor did the Republicans adopt such a plank. Indeed, the platform did not directly address the contentious issue of Reconstruction, though by admitting delegates from some southern states, the convention in effect endorsed Lincoln's approach to Reconstruction rather than that of the Radicals, who maintained that the rebel states were out of the Union.

At the behest of the Missouri delegation, a plank was adopted indirectly calling for the resignation of cabinet Conservatives: "harmony should prevail in the national councils, and we regard as worthy of public confidence and official trust those only who cordially endorse the principles proclaimed in these resolutions and which should characterize the administration of the government."<sup>448</sup> This was widely viewed as a demand for Montgomery Blair's dismissal.

Though willing to intervene to shape the party platform, Lincoln carefully refrained from expressing a preference for a running mate.<sup>449</sup> Shortly before Nicolay left to act as the president's eyes and ears at the convention, Lincoln told him "that all the various candidates and their several supporters being his friends, he deemed it unbecoming in him to advocate the nomination of any one of them; but that privately and personally he would be best pleased if the convention would renominate the old ticket that had been so triumphantly elected in 1860 and which would show an unbroken faith . . . in the Republican party and an unbroken and undivided support of that party to the

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<sup>448</sup> Murphy, Presidential Election, 1864, 4.

<sup>449</sup> Brooks, Washington in Lincoln's Time, ed. Mitgang, 141-42.

administration and in the prosecution of the war.”<sup>450</sup> The delegates chose former Democrat Andrew Johnson of Tennessee to enhance the Republicans’ new identity as the “National Union” party. Nicolay, who served as the president’s agent at the convention, reported shortly before it opened that the “disposition of all the delegates was to take any war Democrat, provided he would add strength to the ticket.”<sup>451</sup> Among those fitting that description were Johnson, John A. Dix, Daniel S. Dickinson, and Joseph Holt, but not the incumbent, Hannibal Hamlin. When Leonard Swett championed Holt for vice-president, the head of the Illinois delegation, Burton C. Cook, asked if the president preferred that Kentuckian. Lincoln wrote in reply that “Mr. Holt is a good man, but I had not heard or thought of him for V.P. Wish not to interfere about V.P. . . . Convention must judge for itself.”<sup>452</sup> Nicolay told Cook that “Lincoln would not wish even to indicate a preference for V. P. as the rival candidates were all friendly to him.”<sup>453</sup> Johnson turned out to be a disastrous choice, but Lincoln had nothing to do with his selection.<sup>454</sup>

Some Radicals expressed pleasure at Johnson’s nomination. George Luther Stearns, who had helped support John Brown and had recruited black troops in Tennessee, congratulated the governor: “If anything can reconcile me to the renomination of Abraham Lincoln, it is the association of your name on the same ticket. Indeed I should have been much better pleased if your name had been placed by the Convention

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<sup>450</sup> Undated memo by Nicolay, [1891?], in Don E. Fehrenbacher and Virginia Fehrenbacher, eds., Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 348.

<sup>451</sup> Nicolay to John Hay, Baltimore, 6 June 1864, Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 145.

<sup>452</sup> Endorsement, [6 June 1864], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 7:376.

<sup>453</sup> Nicolay to Hay, Baltimore, 5 June 1864, in Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 144. See also Nicolay to Charles Hamlin, Washington, 24 February 1896, in Charles Eugene Hamlin, The Life and Times of Hannibal Hamlin (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1899), 591-610.

<sup>454</sup> Don E. Fehrenbacher, “The Making of a Myth: Lincoln and the Vice-Presidential Nomination of 1864,” Civil War History 41 (1995):273-90; James F. Glonek, “Lincoln, Johnson, and the Baltimore Ticket,” Abraham Lincoln Quarterly 6 (1951):255-71.

before our people, for the Presidency.”<sup>455</sup> Lincoln, however, had reservations. When told of the convention’s choice for his running mate, he said: “So they have chosen him – I thought perhaps he would be the man. He is a strong man. I hope he may be the best man. But–.” He did not finish that sentence.<sup>456</sup> According to Noah Brooks, Lincoln at first “made an exclamation that emphatically indicated his disappointment” but shortly thereafter remarked: “Andy Johnson, I think, is a good man.”<sup>457</sup>

The Baltimore convention, which resembled a ratification meeting, was “almost too passive to be interesting.”<sup>458</sup> It resembled a session of the Connecticut legislature which reelected a man to office so regularly that the clerk of the House called for the vote by saying: “Gentlemen will please step up to the desk and deposit their votes for Samuel Wyllis for Secretary of State.”<sup>459</sup> Credentials fights provided some excitement. Of the six Southern delegations, only South Carolina’s was barred. When its members called at the White House en route to Baltimore, Hay told the president: “They are a swindle.” Lincoln assured him: “They won[’]t swindle me.”<sup>460</sup> The most contentious case was Missouri, which sent two delegations, one conservative and the other radical. The credentials committee, acting on Lincoln’s suggestion that Nicolay conveyed to the Illinois delegation, endorsed the “Radical Unionists,” who supported Grant for president. After

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<sup>455</sup> George Luther Stearns to Andrew Johnson, Boston, 9 June 1864, LeRoy P. Graf and Ralph W. Haskins, eds., The Papers of Andrew Johnson (16 vols.; Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1967-2000), 6:721.

<sup>456</sup> A. E. Johnston quoted in Margarita Spalding Gerry, ed., Through Five Administrations: Reminiscences of Colonel William H. Crook, Body-guard to President Lincoln (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1910), 45.

<sup>457</sup> Brooks, Washington in Lincoln’s Time, ed. Mitgang, 148, 142.

<sup>458</sup> W. P. Dole to R. W. Thompson, Washington, 27 May 1864, R. W. Thompson Papers, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne; Nicolay to Hay, Baltimore, 5 June 1864, in Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 144.

<sup>459</sup> New York Journal of Commerce, n.d., copied in the New York Evening Express, 9 June 1864.

<sup>460</sup> Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 199 (entry for 5 June 1864).

the roll call showed Lincoln with 484 votes and Grant 22, the Missourians moved to make nomination unanimous. The decision to seat the Missouri Radicals pleased Lincoln's critics on the left and helped undermine support for Frémont.<sup>461</sup>

On their way home, some delegates stopped at the White House to pay their respects. To Ohioans who serenaded him on June 9, he said: "the hardest of all speeches I have to answer is a serenade. I never know what to say on these occasions. I suppose that you have done me this kindness in connection with the action of the Baltimore convention, which has recently taken place, and with which, of course, I am very well satisfied. [Laughter and applause.] What we want, still more than Baltimore conventions or presidential elections, is success under Gen. Grant. [Cries of "Good," and applause.] I propose that you constantly bear in mind that the support you owe to the brave officers and soldiers in the field is of the very first importance, and we should therefore bend all our energies to that point. Now, without detaining you any longer, I propose that you help me to close up what I am now saying with three rousing cheers for Gen. Grant and the officers and soldiers under his command."<sup>462</sup>

One delegate, William Lloyd Garrison, had his faith in Lincoln strengthened by two White House interviews. "There is no mistake about it in regard to Mr. Lincoln's desire to do all that he can see it right and possible for him to do to uproot slavery, and give fair play to the emancipated," he reported to his wife. "I was much pleased with his spirit, and the familiar and candid way in which he unbosomed himself."<sup>463</sup> (Curiously, according to Garrison's son William, the abolitionist editor frankly criticized Lincoln's

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<sup>461</sup> Franklin B. Sanborn to Moncure D. Conway, Pepperell, Massachusetts, 20 June 1864, Conway Family Papers, Dickinson College.

<sup>462</sup> Reply to serenade, 9 June 1864, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 7:384.

<sup>463</sup> Merrill, ed., Garrison Letters, 5:212.

“shortcomings, – his mistakes in not making the Proclamation universal, the wicked treatment of the colored troops. . . . Not one word of congratulation did he give the President regarding his renomination.”)<sup>464</sup>

Other abolitionists cheered Lincoln’s nomination. The Reverend Mr. J. W. C. Pennington, a black Presbyterian minister, wrote that the prospect of having the incumbent reelected “should awaken in the inmost soul of every American of African descent emotions of the most profound and patriotic enthusiasm.” Lincoln could be considered the black man’s president, Pennington argued, “because he is the only American President who has ever given any attention to colored men as citizens.” To reelect him “will be the best security that the present well-begun work of negro freedom and African redemption will be fully completed.” Pennington, who believed that he voiced “the sentiments of nine-tenths of my colored fellow-citizens,” prayed that God might “grant us four long years more of the judicious administration of that excellent man.”<sup>465</sup> Massachusetts Radicals Franklin B. Sanborn and Frank W. Bird, who had opposed Lincoln earlier in the year, now believed that “the contest will be fought on the old issue, with Lincoln representing really the best of the Antislavery men.” They supported his reelection though deploring “the baseness of the Administration.” Lincoln might be bad, but he was “better than [Fernando] Wood and Vallandigham.” No evil was worse than “throwing power into the hands of the Peace Democrats.”<sup>466</sup> Similarly, the

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<sup>464</sup> William Garrison to his wife, 27 June 1864, Garrison Family Papers, Smith College, in Harriet Hyman Alonso, Growing Up Abolitionist: The Story of the Garrison Children (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 218.

<sup>465</sup> Pennington to the editor, New York, 9 June, Weekly Anglo-African, 25 June 1864.

<sup>466</sup> Franklin B. Sanborn to Moncure D. Conway, Pepperell, Massachusetts, 20 June 1864, Conway Family Papers, Dickinson College; Franklin B. Sanborn to Moncure D. Conway, Florence, Massachusetts, 10 July 1864, Conway Papers, Columbia University.

New York Evening Post grudgingly acknowledged that the people overlooked Lincoln's defects, pardoned his mistakes, and were "prone to forgive even his occasional lapses into serious and dangerous abuses of power." All this they managed to do even though there was "nothing high, generous, [or] heroic in the tone of his administration," and though he "suffers the best opportunities to pass," lacks "knowledge of men," surrounds himself with "unworthy persons like Cameron," stands by "useless instruments like McClellan, long after their uselessness has been shown," has no "profound political convictions or a thoroughly digested system of policy," pays heed "too patiently to mere schemers," and "either drifts into the right course or assumes it with an embarrassed air, as if he took shelter in it as a final expedient."<sup>467</sup> That paper had earlier chastised the administration for "its arbitrary arrests, its suppression of journals, its surrender of fugitives without judicial warrant, and its practical abandonment of the Monroe Doctrine."<sup>468</sup>

The New York Round Table, while conceding that Lincoln was not "a great man" and that he lacked "the sagacity of a statesman," said he was nevertheless "so steadfast, so honest" that "the people feel somehow that he is an eminently safe man to be charged with the conduct of affairs, at a time when perhaps a really more brilliant and wiser statesman would be thrown off his balance." The editors believed that "few Presidents have had more earnest friends than Mr. Lincoln has had and will have in time to come."<sup>469</sup>

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<sup>467</sup> New York Evening Post, 9 June 1864.

<sup>468</sup> New York Evening Post, 1 June 1864.

<sup>469</sup> Round Table (New York), n.d., copied in the New York Evening Express, 9 June 1864.

While responding “with considerable emotion and solemnity” to the committee presenting formal notification of his candidacy, Lincoln appeared “deeply affected.”<sup>470</sup> In his remarks, he laid special emphasis on the constitutional amendment abolishing slavery: “I will neither conceal my gratification, nor restrain the expression of my gratitude, that the Union people, through their convention, in their continued effort to save, and advance the nation, have deemed me not unworthy to remain in my present position. I know no reason to doubt that I shall accept the nomination tendered; and yet perhaps I should not declare definitely before reading and considering what is called the Platform. I will say now, however, I approve the declaration in favor of so amending the Constitution as to prohibit slavery throughout the nation. When the people in revolt, with a hundred days of explicit notice, that they could, within those days, resume their allegiance, without the overthrow of their institution, and that they could not so resume it afterwards, elected to stand out, such an amendment of the Constitution is now proposed, became a fitting, and necessary conclusion to the final success of the Union cause. Such alone can meet and cover all cavils. Now, the unconditional Union men, North and South, perceive its importance, and embrace it. In the joint names of Liberty and Union, let us labor to give it legal form, and practical effect.”<sup>471</sup>

Lincoln told a deputation from the Radical-dominated National Union League which informed him of that body’s endorsement: “I am very grateful for the renewed confidence which has been accorded to me, both by the convention and by the National League. I am not insensible at all to the personal compliment there is in this; yet I do not

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<sup>470</sup> Brooks, Washington in Lincoln’s Time, ed. Mitgang, 149; Washington correspondence, 10 June, Sacramento Daily Union, 4 July 1864, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 112.

<sup>471</sup> Reply to committee, 9 June 1864, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 7:380.



allow myself to believe that any but a small portion of it is to be appropriated as a personal compliment. The convention and the nation, I am assured, are alike animated by a higher view of the interests of the country for the present and the great future, and that part I am entitled to appropriate as a compliment is only that part which I may lay hold of as being the opinion of the convention and of the League, that I am not entirely unworthy to be intrusted with the place I have occupied for the last three years. I have not permitted myself, gentlemen, to conclude that I am the best man in the country; but I am reminded, in this connection, of a story of an old Dutch farmer, who remarked to a companion once that 'it was not best to swap horses when crossing streams.'<sup>472</sup>

The following month, Lincoln received a formal notification of his nomination containing a passage which its author, George William Curtis, designed so as to offer the president a chance to address the Democrats' complaint about arbitrary arrests:

"Believing with you, Sir, that this is the people's war for the maintenance of a government which you have justly described as 'of the people, by the people, for the people' we are very sure that you will be glad to know not only from the resolutions themselves, but from the singular harmony & enthusiasm with which they were adopted how warm is the popular welcome of every measure in the prosecution of the war which is as vigorous, unmistakable & unfaltering as the national purpose itself. No right, for instance, is so precious and sacred to the American heart as that of personal liberty. Its violation is regarded with just, instant & universal jealousy. Yet in this hour of peril every faithful citizen concedes that, for the sake of national existence and the common

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<sup>472</sup> Reply to committee, 9 June 1864, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 7:383.

welfare, individual liberty may, as the Constitution provides in case of rebellion, be sometimes summarily constrained.”<sup>473</sup> Lincoln did not avail himself of the opportunity.<sup>474</sup>

The president took intense pleasure in the convention’s action. He had predicted to Alexander K. McClure that “his name would go down into history darkly shadowed by a fraternal war that he would be held responsible for inaugurating if he were unable to continue in office to conquer the Rebellion and restore the Union.”<sup>475</sup>

Democrats sneered at the Republican ticket. “The tail does not shame the head,” said the New York World apropos of Johnson’s nomination. “A railsplitting buffoon and a boorish tailor, both from the backwoods, both growing up in uncouth ignorance, . . . God save the Republic!”<sup>476</sup> Equally contemptuous, Ben Butler sarcastically exclaimed to his wife: “Hurrah for Lincoln and Johnson! That’s the ticket! This country has more vitality than any other on earth if it can stand this sort of administration for another four years.”<sup>477</sup> The New York Herald called the president “a country lawyer of more than average shrewdness, and of far more than the average indelicacy which marks the Western wit.”<sup>478</sup>

It was not clear that the country would in fact have the same administration for another quadrennium, for Lincoln’s popularity might prove ephemeral. In late May, Theodore Tilton noted that there “is an insane popular sympathy for him [Lincoln]

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<sup>473</sup> Committee of the National Union Convention to Lincoln, 14 June 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>474</sup> Curtis to Charles Eliot Norton, North Shore, New York, 10 June 1864, Curtis Papers, Harvard University.

<sup>475</sup> A. K. McClure, Our Presidents and How We Make Them (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1900), 184.

<sup>476</sup> New York World, n.d., copied in the New York Evening Express, 9 June 1864.

<sup>477</sup> Butler to his wife, Fort Monroe, 11 June 1862, Ames, ed., Correspondence of Butler, 4:337.

<sup>478</sup> New York Herald, 9 September 1864.

everywhere – very shallow, it is true – but salty & flavorsome, even though shallow, like Dr. Livingston’s lake.”<sup>479</sup> The shallow lake of the president’s popularity might evaporate in the fierce heat of summer if Grant did not promptly defeat Lee.

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<sup>479</sup> Theodore Tilton to Wendell Phillips, New York, 31 May 1864, Phillips Papers, Harvard University.