

Abraham Lincoln:
The Strategic Path to Emancipation and Preservation

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Abstract

Despite being one of the most well-known American presidents, of whom countless works of scholarship have been constructed, Abraham Lincoln has often been misrepresented as hesitant and tentative in his approach to abolishing slavery. Instead, his dedication to preserving the nation has been cited as his most vital imperative. This paper will argue that this is not the case. While Abraham Lincoln was dedicated to the preservation of the Union, the idea of equality for all was equally important to him, and his ultimate goal was always to dismantle the practice of slavery. Nevertheless, his dedication to the Constitution and adherence to lawfulness kept his personal desires in check, thereby restraining him to accept that a moderate pace toward abolition was the only way to achieve his goal. Utilizing Lincoln's letters and speeches, along with the writings of a number of his colleagues, this paper will show that Lincoln possessed the political cunning to understand that each step toward abolition required precise timing for its execution and that appearing too radical would only hinder the case. To this end, he skillfully used his aptitude for linguistics to his advantage, catering his words to his audience. In addition, he understood how to manipulate the media to his advantage as well. Masterfully, he played the political long game in order to achieve his objective, the abolition of slavery, while simultaneously, executing his duty as Commander in Chief, managing to navigate and win America's bloodiest and most defining war. In the end, although it required Lincoln's most noble sacrifice, he managed to hold together a fragmenting nation while simultaneously achieving his primary goal of ensuring the freedom of four million enslaved African Americans.

Abraham Lincoln is arguably the most well-known American president. Many know him as the president who issued in a “new birth of freedom” and who became known as the “great emancipator” accredited with freeing the slaves. On the other hand, many historians have argued Lincoln does not deserve this recognition. Instead, they paint him as a moderate, indecisive, and fickle president, who unwittingly brought an end to slavery in the United States. However, from the beginning of his career, Lincoln was an unrelenting anti-slavery politician, and his Emancipation Proclamation was directly responsible for the death of slavery. He was extremely devoted to lawfulness and the constitutionality of his measures. With a profound understanding of the political landscape of his era and his presidential power, Abraham Lincoln masterfully pursued and achieved both his ultimate goal of ending slavery and his desire to preserve the nation.

Lincoln’s disdain for slavery was an ongoing theme in Lincoln’s life that was clearly highlighted early in his political career. Attracted to the ideals of liberty and the possibility of personal economic advancement, Lincoln began his early on-again-off-again political career as a member of the Whig Party. Considering his humble background, the party’s foundation, based upon a man’s ability to remake himself based on merit and self-improvement, understandably held a strong attraction to Lincoln.¹ Nevertheless, as the 1850s progressed a factional divide fragmented the national political parties, including the Whig Party. As Southerners become ever-increasingly insistent upon slavery being the basis of their economic and societal livelihoods, Northerners began to view slavery as a danger to fundamental principles and interests. Meanwhile, as the Whig, Know-Nothings, and Democratic parties deteriorated along pro-slavery

¹ Allen Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 57.

and anti-slavery sectional lines the Republican party emerged in the mid-1850s. The new party introduced an ideology built upon the idea that the Southern antebellum society was inferior to that of the North and that the Southern “Slave Power” had long since “seized control of the federal government and was attempting to pervert the Constitution for its own purposes.” Thus, the passing of the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act, which effectively overturned the ban on slavery North of 36° 30’, served as evidence of such perversion spawning the emergence of the new party and Abraham Lincoln’s renewed interest in politics. In fact, Lincoln addressed this renewed interest in politics in a biographical sketch he penned to Jesse W. Fell in December of 1859 writing, “Always a whig in politics, and generally on the whig electoral tickets... I was losing interest in politics, when the repeal of the Missouri Compromise aroused me again.” By the end of 1855, “the Whig Party was no longer a viable political organization,” in turn, less than two years later, Lincoln would be elected president, not as a Whig, but as a Republican.²

On the road to that election, Lincoln expressed his anti-slavery sentiments regularly as the eventual death of slavery became his focal point. Lincoln, devoted to his ideals of economic mobility which had been ingrained into him as a Whig, began to associate such aspirations of achievement and improvement with the slaves, believing their liberation from bondage and subsequent success to be important stepping-stones of moral progress. As Lincoln settled into his new political party, he made his sentiments known as his speeches and writings became increasingly antislavery. In Chicago, in December of 1856, Lincoln gave a speech at the Republican Banquet issuing a warning concerning the Democratic Presidential Administration of

² Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 9; James M. McPherson, *Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) 15; Abraham Lincoln to Jesse W. Fell, Dec. 20, 1859, House Divided: The Civil War Research Engine at Dickinson College, <https://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/28154>. (All following citations from this collection will hereafter be referenced as House Divided Collection.); David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 189.

James Buchanan which, according to Lincoln was struggling against the founding principle that all men were created equal and substituting that principle “for the opposite idea that slavery is right... the workings of which, as a central idea, may be the perpetuity of human slavery.”

Nonetheless, the new Republican Party would “renew the broader, better declaration... that all *men* are created equal.” Similarly, in 1858, before engaging in his famous debates with Stephen A. Douglas, Lincoln presented his view on the opposing political parties stating, “the difference between the Republican and the Democratic parties... is, that the former considers slavery a moral, social and political wrong, while the latter *do not* consider it either a moral, social or political wrong.” Continuing, he espoused his condemnation of the Democratic Party’s “utter indifference” which seemed to “boldly suggest that slavery is *better* than freedom.”

Meanwhile, Lincoln praised the Republican party’s ideological stance “that this government was instituted to secure the blessings of freedom, and that slavery is an unqualified evil to the negro, to the white man, to the soil, and to the State.”³ Despite the potency of these words, Lincoln recognized the current political climate and the limits of his abilities, and the abilities of his party in such an environment.

Consequently, knowing he and the Republicans would get nowhere espousing ideals that were considered excessively radical at the time, while simultaneously recognizing the existence of constitutionally placed restrictions on the measures that could be taken against the institution, Lincoln tempered his strong opposition to slavery. Therefore, he included, “regarding it an evil, they will not molest it in the States where it exists; they will not overlook the constitutional

³ McPherson, *Abraham Lincoln*, 16; Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln*, 184; Abraham Lincoln, Speech at a Republican Banquet, Chicago, IL, 10 December 1856, House Divided Collection, <https://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/edu/node/40535>; Abraham Lincoln, Speech at Edwardsville, IL, 11 September 1858, Abraham Lincoln Association, Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/l/lincoln/lincoln3/1:13?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>. (All following citations for this collection will hereafter be referenced as ALA.)

guards which our forefathers have placed around it; they will do nothing which can give proper offence to those who hold slaves by legal sanction.” Such word choices have left many historians under the assumption Lincoln had no plan to end slavery at the beginning of his political career. Yet, it is precisely these, and similar, carefully chosen words that indicate he would rid the nation of slavery if ever such a move could feasibly be made on legal terms. Lincoln even admitted to this dilemma regarding slavery during his first debate with Douglas in August of 1858, conceding, “that it is very difficult to get rid of it, in any satisfactory way.” In illustration of his desire to terminate slavery immediately, he said, “If all earthly power were given me, I should not know what to do, as to the existing institution. My first impulse would be to free all the slaves.” Again, strategically choosing his words, he added, “but a moment's reflection would convince me... its sudden execution is impossible.”⁴ Lincoln knew there was no plan for the slaves if they were freed at once, that they would not survive such abrupt freedom without a means to provide for themselves. Lincoln elaborated further on such matters as his debates with Douglas continued.

Six days later at the second debate with Douglas, Lincoln further expressed his position on the details of the slavery dispute. Interestingly, Lincoln always tempered his own hatred of slavery with decisions he felt were constitutionally permissible. For instance, when questioned about the possible admittance of additional slave states to the Union, Lincoln’s reluctance to permit more slave states was evident, “I should be exceedingly glad to know that there would never be another slave State admitted into the Union,” he answered. Nonetheless, he turned to the legality of such a move adding that if “the people shall, having a fair chance and a clear field,

⁴ Abraham Lincoln, Speech at Edwardsville, 11 September 1858, ALA, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/l/lincoln/lincoln3/1:13?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>; Abraham Lincoln, First Debate with Stephen Douglas, Ottawa, IL, 21 August 1858, House Divided Collection, <https://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/40410>.

when they come to adopt the Constitution, do such an extraordinary thing as to adopt a slave Constitution... I see no alternative... but to admit them into the Union.” Illustrating his political cunning of never aiming to overstep legal bounds. By the same token, he was not shy of using means he considered to be constitutionally admissible against slavery either. During the same debate with Douglas and in regard to the question of abolishing the slave trade in the District of Columbia, Lincoln’s desires and legal allowances were in accordance with one another. Therefore, he observed, “I believe that Congress possesses the constitutional power to abolish it,” and confessed, “I would be exceedingly glad to see Congress abolish slavery in the District of Columbia.” Nevertheless, in his strategic fashion, he recognized his audience and thus tempered his response with conditions that would appease the public. In this manner, Lincoln was able to sidestep the political trap Douglas was setting for him within the debates, which was to paint Lincoln as a radical Republican ready to accept the equality of the black race.⁵ Fortunately, Lincoln knew that the only way to accomplish the abolition of slavery was to do so in measured steps, but that was always his eventual goal.

As to the equality of the races, Lincoln could not advocate for such a drastic measure and still hope to win the Senatorial contest against Douglas or any other political advancement. Therefore, he had to tread carefully when it came to this issue. It is no secret Lincoln did not *openly* support equality among blacks and whites. He said so himself even during the debates with Douglas. In his first debate with Douglas Lincoln expressed this sentiment saying, “There is a physical difference between the two, which, in my judgment, will probably forever forbid their living together upon the footing of perfect equality.” Yet Lincoln did not commit to any white

⁵ Abraham Lincoln, Second Debate with Stephen Douglas, Freeport, IL, 27 August 1858, House Divided Collection, <https://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/40411>; Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 204.

supremacy views either. In fact, the most prejudiced claim that can be attributed to Lincoln against the black race was his claim, “he is not my equal in many respects-certainly not in color, perhaps not in moral or intellectual endowment.” Yet even with this statement of supposed inequality, Lincoln qualified the claim with the word “perhaps.” Meaning he made no commitment to the inferiority of the black race in regard to their moral or intellectual endowment. The only thing he committed to being unequal between the races was the color of their skins.⁶

Nevertheless, Lincoln knew the radical abolitionist desire of seeing the two races living in harmony as equals was impossible. The harsh racial climate would not permit such a mixing of the races. Lincoln understood that the emancipation of the slaves would result in a large population of African Americans that could not be integrated into society. Instead, blacks would be forced into a subservient and lowly position in the social order that would prevent them from reaching any substantial success. Therefore, Lincoln’s answer to the problem was colonization. He agreed with the idea that blacks would never be given a fair chance in America, therefore once emancipated, they should be returned to Africa where they could obtain real freedom. Perhaps surprisingly, this plan was not without African American support. Many blacks supported the idea of returning to Africa. In fact, Reverend Robert Finley of New Jersey started an organization known as the American Colonization Society (ACS) to help implement black immigration to Africa. Thus, given the era, the social climate, and with black support of the idea, it is not surprising Lincoln considered colonization to be a viable and reasonable option following emancipation. For him, the inability to equate the races within society was based upon

⁶ Lincoln, First Debate with Stephen A. Douglas, House Divided Collection, <https://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/40410>; Goodwin, *Team of Rivals*, 205.

practicality, not his principles. Lincoln would hold onto this logical opposition to equality and the necessity of colonization of blacks until the war pushed him to an “active commitment to equality beyond freedom from bondage,” and acceptance of the reality “that the freed slave would be a continuing presence in the nation’s future.”⁷

At this point, one could raise the question as to why Lincoln had not been so outspoken on the issue of slavery earlier in his political career. For one thing, early on he had been less likely to flout any of his views publicly. For another, Lincoln had not taken a strong anti-slavery position early on simply because he assumed slavery was already on the road to dying out. He even admitted as much in a letter to Williamson Durley in 1845, writing, “I hold it to be a paramount duty of us in the free states, due to the Union of the states, and perhaps to liberty itself (paradox though it may seem) to let the slavery of the other states alone,” while simultaneously he advocated, “we should never knowingly lend ourselves directly or indirectly, to prevent that slavery from dying a natural death.” Lincoln expressly felt the purpose of government was to do for the people what they could not do for themselves; furthermore, the government had no business interfering in most matters, save wrongdoings and public works.⁸ For him, slavery was one such wrongdoing.

Lincoln had been antislavery even in his early involvement with politics, yet most historians seem to neglect his early support of abolition, and those who do mention it tend to modulate his antislavery sentiments. For instance, although historian Eric Foner does accredit

⁷ Eric Foner, *Our Lincoln* (New York: Norton & Company, 2008) 137-143; Lawanda Cox, *Lincoln and Black Freedom: A Study in Presidential Leadership* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1981) 22-23.

⁸ Michael Burlingame, *The Inner World of Abraham Lincoln* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 24-26; Abraham Lincoln to Williamson Durley, 3 October 1845, House Divided Collection, <https://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/40360>; Abraham Lincoln, Fragment on the Legitimate Object of Government, Library of Congress, Abraham Lincoln papers, 840, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mal0049400/>. (All following citations from this collection will hereafter be referenced as LOC.)

Lincoln's early antislavery ideals, he frequently claims Lincoln was not an abolitionist. Nonetheless, as early as 1837, when he was serving in the Illinois State Legislature, Lincoln had given his first public demonstration against slavery when he and an associate officially protested in opposition to an anti-abolitionist resolution that had recently been passed by that legislature. However, of this protest, Foner asserts it was "hardly a ringing condemnation of slavery." Yet, that same year, Lincoln proposed an amendment for the termination of slavery in the District of Columbia. Unfortunately, Lincoln's proposal failed due to the lack of Congressional authority to abolish slavery. Again, in 1849, Lincoln proposed abolishing slavery in the capital, this time he proposed doing it with the consent of slave owners, who would be compensated in return. Consequently, after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850, Lincoln, once again a practicing lawyer, avoided runaway slave cases. Always a devotee of the law, Lincoln could not act in defiance of it, but he did not hesitate to condemn the law in private.⁹ Ultimately, it was the overturning of the Missouri Compromise that prompted Lincoln to take a stronger position against slavery.

With his return to politics, Lincoln rose in reputation and leadership within the Republican Party, and in 1858, Lincoln was nominated for U.S. Senator by the Republican Party. In his acceptance speech for the nomination, Lincoln illustrated that his drive to eliminate slavery was stronger than ever when he declared, "We shall not fail- if we stand firm, we shall not fail. *Wise councils may accelerate or mistakes delay* it, but, sooner or later the victory is *sure* to come." Although Lincoln lost the Senatorial race against Stephen A. Douglas, he was right about his party's eventual success against slavery, and he would carry this determination with

⁹ Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York: Norton & Company, 2010), 26; Remarks and Resolution Concerning Abolition of Slavery in the District of Columbia. 13th Cong., 2d sess. 1849, ALA, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/l/lincoln/lincoln2/1:21?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>; Burlingame, *The Inner World of Abraham Lincoln*, 26-27.

him until then. Despite this defeat, Lincoln's rise to prominence within the Republican Party did not end with his Senatorial nomination. By 1859, Lincoln's political ingenuity had positioned him as a likely candidate for the Republican nominee for the upcoming presidential election. As his prominence as a clever and calculating figure spread, so did his political reputation. Lincoln brilliantly urged others of his party to avoid divisive issues that could damage the party's reputation in more conservative states. His party could not become recognized as advocates of "Negro equality," even if they supported it. Such a move would spell political suicide for the Republicans. Instead, Lincoln urged party unity and insisted the Republican Party was the conservative party. Moreover, he promoted keeping the slavery question at the political forefront, instead of falling back on "safer" issues.¹⁰ Lincoln recognized slavery was the issue of the day, but he also knew radicalism could be politically dangerous.

In February of 1860, following John Brown's infamous raid on the federal armory at Harper's Ferry with the intent to start a slave rebellion and amidst subsequent rumors of possible secession, Lincoln was able to secure the Republican presidential nomination when he gave one of the most significant speeches of his career. Lincoln was invited to speak at the Cooper Institute, better known today as Cooper's Union, in New York on February 27, 1860. It was this speech that exemplified Lincoln's shrewd crowd-pleasing persona. Lincoln knew how to address his audience, and once again he appealed to constitutionality, this time employing it against secession and in firm agitation against the issue of slavery. He declared that the Republicans sought not to deny some specific right of slave owners. In fact, he insisted no such right existed within the constitution but was only inferred by those in favor of slavery. Therefore, to break up

¹⁰ Abraham Lincoln, A House Divided Speech, Springfield, IL, 16 June 1858, ALA, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/l/lincoln/lincoln2/1:508?rgn=div1;singlegenre=All;sort=occur;subview=detail;type=simple;view=fulltext;q1=house+divided+speech>; Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 132-137.

the Union based on a perceived threat against such an inference, would be “reckless.” He went a step further, “[Republicans], on the contrary, deny that such a right has any existence in the Constitution, even by implication,” Lincoln insisted. He did not finish there but accused, “you will destroy the Government, unless you be allowed to construe and enforce the Constitution as you please.” By referencing the antislavery convictions of the founding fathers and their dedication to the freedom of *all* men, Lincoln was able to successfully portray the Republicans as moderate conservatives seeking to continue the work of the nation’s founders. This was a brilliant political move that was well-received. In fact, the next day, the *New York Daily Tribune* reported, “Mr. Lincoln’s speech excited frequent and irrepressible applause,” and that “At the conclusion of his speech Mr. Lincoln received the congratulations of a large number of his friends and the friends of Republicanism.” Thus, it was this speech that propelled Lincoln into a national figure worthy to serve as a presidential candidate.¹¹

Of course, Lincoln won the presidential election of 1860, which resulted in a national upheaval as Southern states feared Lincoln’s antislavery sentiments would mean the end of slavery in the Union. Following Lincoln’s election, the president-elect faced an issue more pressing than slavery as threats of secession became a reality. On November 22, 1860, the same month Lincoln was elected president, the *Yorkville Enquirer* warned, “[South Carolina] must secede... the necessity which has been laid upon us by the incendiary designs and diabolic acts of the Abolitionists... we affirm that the worst enemy the negro has on the face of the earth, is the *Black Republican*.” Within a month of Lincoln’s election, all the states in the lower South

¹¹ Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 137; Harold Holzer, *Lincoln at Cooper Union: The Speech That Made Abraham Lincoln President* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 1-7; Abraham Lincoln, Address at Cooper Institute, New York, NY, 27 February 1860, House Divided Collection, <https://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/40349>; Donald, *Lincoln*, 238-240; “A Speech Delivered at the Cooper Institute Last Evening by Abraham Lincoln of Illinois.” *New York Daily Tribune*, New York, NY, 28 February 1860, LOC, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.rbc/lprbscsm.scsm0237>; Holzer, *Lincoln at Cooper Union*, 1-7.

were taking measures to secede from the Union. Unfortunately, the existing government had not devised a policy regarding secession, and the young Republican party had no experience with practical leadership. As the newly elected president, Lincoln had his work cut out for him.¹²

For one thing, many of Lincoln's opposers, including his longtime rival Stephen Douglas, feared Lincoln would impose a uniformity to laws and morality throughout the Union which would challenge the principle of popular sovereignty within individual states, which had long allowed states to govern themselves more independently. Since Lincoln espoused nationalist ideals concerning fundamental human rights and freedoms, such fears appeared to be justified. In illustration, one such "Sterenuous opponent" anonymously wrote to Lincoln on December 5, 1860, warning "tread not upon our individual rights as Sovereign States," and that "[Southern men] Stand ready to Sacrafice Their lives... united we stand divided we fall." Yet for Lincoln, it was exactly this concept of each "doing just as they choose, in all matters which concern no other part," that necessitated adopting a unified standard on the slavery issue which concerned the entire nation. "Republicans believe that slavery is wrong; and they insist, and will continue to insist upon a national policy which recognizes it," Lincoln professed. Furthermore, Lincoln objected to the use of popular sovereignty in defense of slavery saying it, "was so perverted in this attempted use of it as to amount to just this: That if any *one* man, choose to enslave *another*, no *third* man shall be allowed to object." Furthermore, Lincoln insisted, "in *my* opinion, it *will* not cease, until a *crisis* shall have been reached, and passed," illustrating the slavery issue was a *national* issue he avowed "this government cannot endure, permanently half *slave* and half *free*."¹³ Slavery was not the concern of a small number of states, or a matter only involving the

¹² *Yorkville Enquirer*, Yorkville, SC, 22 November 1860, LOC, <https://lccn.loc.gov/sn84026925>; Donald, *Lincoln*, 257.

¹³ Foner, *Our Lincoln*, 125-126; J.A.C. to Abraham Lincoln, 5 December 1860, LOC, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms000001.mss30189a.0481600>; Abraham Lincoln, Draft of speech on Popular Sovereignty, 1858, LOC, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/000001.mss30189a.0481600>

Southern states, but an issue engrossing the entire nation, and what was done about it, was in the interest of the Union as a *whole*.

In addition, Southerners took the abolitionist movement to be a revolution that required a counter-revolution in response. When secession shifted from a threat to reality, Jefferson Davis professed that it was “to better secure the liberties for the preservation of which the Union was established,” and that it was, “to save ourselves from a revolution” that motivated six of the Southern states to secede. On the other hand, Northerners perceived the hypocrisy of Southern demands for liberty, when the very liberty they demanded was their right to own slaves and to transport those slaves through the states and territories within the Union. As for Lincoln, he defended revolution which he considered to be a moral right. However, he contended it was only such a right when employed to further a moral cause. Therefore, the lack of moral justification for Southern secession prompted Lincoln’s belief that the Southern counterrevolution was an atrocious exertion of power.¹⁴

Moreover, Lincoln who was an ardent advocate of the Declaration of Independence, and of the Constitution, and who believed wholeheartedly in the “fragile experiment” of the U.S. democratic form of government, questioned the legality of secession and feared the devastation of such a move. He understood that, should secession be recognized as a potential option, it would mean the end of the Union. Even if the pieces could eventually be reunified, the precedence for such a move would be set. Therefore, the next time the minority wished to break

gov/loc.mss/ms000001.mss30189a.4339400; Abraham Lincoln, Notes for Speeches at Columbus and Cincinnati, OH 16-17 September 1859, ALA, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/l/lincoln/lincoln3/1:138.1?rgn=div2;view=fulltext>; Lincoln, A House Divided Speech, ALA, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/l/lincoln/lincoln2/1:508?rgn=div1;singlegenre=All;sort=occur;subview=detail;type=simple;view=fulltext;q1=house+divided+speech>.

¹⁴ Jefferson, Davis, *Constitutionalist: His Letters, Papers and Speeches*, (New York: JJ Little & Ives Company, 1923), 200; James M. McPherson, *Abraham Lincoln: And the Second American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 116-117.

up the Union, there would be no preventing such an attempt. Lincoln held, “that in contemplation of universal law, and of the Constitution, the Union of these States is perpetual.” He also thought it to be impossible for any government to provide lawful provisions for its own destruction.

Therefore, it was, “impossible to destroy it, except by some action not provided for in the instrument itself.” In other words, there was no legitimacy in secession. In addition, Lincoln felt if the Union dispersed and democracy failed, it would be a devastating blow not just to the U.S. but to the world. The Union represented freedom and liberty to *all* men, and if the seceding states were permitted to establish their own country built upon inequality, it would undermine what the nation stood for. The “experiment” would fail and hope for a true republic would be lost.¹⁵

Despite these worries, Lincoln refused to take a softened position on slavery, even if it meant preventing Southern states from seceding. In a letter to U.S. Senator Lyman Trumbull in December of 1860, Lincoln wrote, “Let there be no compromise on the question of extending slavery. The tug has come, and better now, than any time hereafter.”¹⁶ Although Lincoln desperately wanted to preserve the Union, he knew there was no turning back on the slavery question. Slavery could not be allowed to spread.

In December of 1860, fearing an incoming Republican president would mean the dismantling of slavery in the South, a flurry of proposals greeted a reconvening Congress. The most popular plan concerning the future of slavery originated from John J. Crittenden, a longtime politician from Kentucky. The proposal would become known as the Crittenden Compromise, and it consisted of several amendments to the Constitution which were constructed to mediate federal authority over slavery and that would be unamendable in the future. First, Congress

¹⁵ Abraham Lincoln, First Inaugural Address, Final Version, March 1861, LOC, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms000001.mss30189a.0773800>; McPherson, *Abraham Lincoln: and the Second American Revolution*, 28-29.

¹⁶ “Abraham Lincoln to Lyman Trumbull,” 10 December 1860, House Divided Collection, <https://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/40402>.

would be denied the power to abolish slavery. Second, unless Virginia and Maryland both freed their slaves, abolition would be barred in the District of Columbia. Third, federal interference with the slave trade would be prohibited. Fourth, the boundary set in place by the Missouri Compromise would be extended to the Pacific Ocean, thereby acting as a divider between free and slave states and ensuring in the future additional slave states could be added to the Union. Moreover, Lincoln's longtime rival, Stephen Douglas, offered his support to the compromise, adding a few stipulations of his own. For one thing, states would be prohibited from granting black suffrage to freedmen. For another, any states willing to colonize free blacks would be offered federal aid to transport them to Africa or South America. Finally, Douglas called for the criminalization of writings and speeches that were unsympathetic to slavery. Many of Lincoln's party urged him to agree to the Crittenden Compromise in order to avoid the secession crisis. For example, on February 8, 1861, Senator Richard M. Young wrote, "I am clearly of opinion that all patriotic, and conservative Republicans, would vote for them without any sacrifice of principle." Meanwhile, other Republicans staunchly opposed the compromise. January 31, 1861, abolitionist and Civil War general Carl Schurz pleaded, "Save us once more, I beseech you," imploring Lincoln, "If our cause is thus to be given up, if the future of Liberty in this Republic is thus to be sacrificed- I wonder why we have struggled so hard, to render it victorious!"¹⁷ Lincoln faced the harsh reality that if he did not agree to the compromise more states would undoubtedly secede and there would be no reunification of those that had already seceded; nonetheless, if he agreed to the compromise, slavery would continue indefinitely, and he would have no legal authority whatsoever at his disposal to end its broadening.

¹⁷ Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 148; Richard M. Young to Abraham Lincoln, 8 February 1861, LOC, <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms000001.mss.30189a.0726800>; Carl Schurz to Abraham Lincoln, 31 January 1861, LOC, <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms000001.mss30189a.0696900>.

Thus, Lincoln would be taking office at a time of unprecedented crisis for the Union; yet before he could deal with the calamity, he needed to establish his presidential cabinet. In this endeavor, Lincoln demonstrated his true political genius. Wisely, Lincoln conferred with and astutely attended to the opinions of an array of various politicians as he set up his cabinet. He was sure to include several of his rivals including William H. Seward, who had been Lincoln's closest rival for the 1860 presidential nomination. He appointed Seward to serve as Secretary of State. Moreover, Lincoln included politicians from various factions with a variety of political opinions to serve as members of his cabinet, allowing them a wide range of freedom in their respective offices. For instance, to serve as Secretary of the Treasury, Lincoln chose the particularly radical Republican Salmon P. Chase. Meanwhile, Lincoln's choice for Attorney General was a moderate from Missouri, Edward Bates, who had also been Lincoln's rival for the 1860 presidential nomination. In addition, to offer fair representation to the border states, Lincoln appointed Montgomery Blair, a lawyer, and politician from Maryland to the position of Postmaster General. In addition, Gideon Welles was appointed Secretary of the Navy, Caleb Smith was made Secretary of the Interior, and Simon Cameron was selected as Secretary of War.¹⁸ With his cabinet complete, Lincoln was able to turn his attention back to the crisis at hand.

Lincoln expected the crisis to resolve itself. Moreover, believing there was no lawful support for secession, he "turned a deaf ear" to Congressional proposals and to proslavery supporters who begged him to issue some sort of concession. Nevertheless, as the secession crisis evolved and rumors of war began to circulate, Lincoln was forced to face the gravity of the situation. Meanwhile, Lincoln continued to stand firm against compromising on the question of

¹⁸ Goodwin, *Team of Rivals*, 283-293.

slavery, this included consideration of the Crittenden Compromise, which was eventually voted down by the Republicans. As a result, the secessionist fire was fueled, and by January 1, 1861, the seven states of the lower South had seceded from the Union. On February 4, representatives from the seven states met to draft the preliminary constitution for a confederacy of slave states. In the meantime, the states belonging to the upper South were left divided on whether to leave the Union in favor of joining the new Confederacy of slave states or to remain within the Union. Likewise, the border states were left in a similar state of limbo. This prompted members of Lincoln's party to once again urge him to consider a conciliatory compromise. Again, Lincoln refused.¹⁹

As Lincoln was sworn in as president on March 4, 1861, he was faced with the brutal reality that the Union was fracturing. Accordingly, with his first Inaugural Address, Lincoln offered both peace and warning to the Southern states. First, he assured the South that because he possessed no legal authority to interfere with slavery, he would refrain from doing so, "the property, peace and security of no section are to be in anywise endangered by the now incoming Administration," he assured them. He then turned his attention to the legitimacy of secession asserting, "no State, upon its own mere motion, can lawfully get out of the Union," and he warned the assumed seceded states, "that acts of violence, within any State or States, against the authority of the United States, are insurrectionary or treasonable revolutionary." Furthermore, he made it amply clear that he considered the Union to be intact and thus intended it to remain so. Again, he offered the possibility of peace to the South while simultaneously issuing a warning, declaring, "there needs to be no bloodshed or violence; and there shall be none, unless it be

¹⁹ Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln*, 254; Richard Striner, *Father Abraham: Lincoln's Relentless Struggle to End Slavery* (Cary: Oxford University Press, 2007), 113, 115-116.

forced upon the national authority.” Nonetheless, Lincoln intended to regain and hold all public and government property, even that which stood in the South.²⁰

Unsurprisingly, Lincoln’s address caused widespread reactions and emotional outpouring from both the North and South. In the North, on March 6, 1861, the *New York Herald* reported on Lincoln’s address, “the republicans are in rapture over it.” In Kansas, “the bells are ringing... and there is general rejoicing in honor of the inauguration of President Lincoln.” Nonetheless, Northerners were not ignorant of the possible repercussions Lincoln’s address could trigger. The same paper reported Michigan believed the address was “certain to cause secession of the border states.” Meanwhile, in the South, sentiments were far more hostile. It was reported that New Orleans had received Lincoln’s “assertion that the ordinances of the seceded States are void, and their acts insurrectionary, coupled with the determination to hold and possess government property,” to be “an open declaration of war.” Identically, Mississippi and Kentucky also “considered it a declaration of war.” Similarly, Tennessee reportedly would “fight him to the bitter end.”²¹ Lincoln’s offer for peace was met with open aggression by Southerners. At least for the South, the nation had no choice but to prepare for war.

Meanwhile, Lincoln remained reluctant for war, urging the seceded states to reconsider and temper their rash hostility. Nonetheless, as the Southern states ignored Lincoln’s pleas, he was faced with a dilemma; he had promised not to attack the Southern states, and he had also vowed to hold and possess all government property. However, the South had seized and attempted to control federal property located within the new Confederacy. As a result, Fort Sumter, a sea fort located on an island in Charleston that served to protect South Carolina from

²⁰ Lincoln, First Inaugural Address, LOC.

²¹ *New York Herald*, Morning ed. New York, 6 March 1861, LOC, <https://lccn.loc.gov/sn83030313>.

naval invasion, became a point of contention as it was in desperate need of resupply from the federal government. Attempts to resupply Fort Sumter were being denied by the Confederacy. In fact, the newly established Confederacy denied Lincoln the ability to carry out his executive duties within the South, and the new Confederate government warned that any attempt by Lincoln to do so would be seen as an act of war by the secessionists. Lincoln recognized that yielding the fort to the South would equate to recognizing the Confederacy, essentially legitimizing it, which in turn could prompt foreign countries to offer aid to the Confederate cause. Yet, if he attempted a peaceful resupply of Fort Sumter and Charleston agreed, South Carolina's sovereignty would be challenged. Lincoln understood this tactic would likely result in a conflict, but the North would not be to blame for the provocation. So, in a strategically brilliant political maneuver, Lincoln decided to announce to the Confederates that an unarmed attempt at resupply would be made to feed hungry men trapped within the fort. Lincoln's notification to South Carolina was made on April 6, 1861, in which he promised, "an attempt will be made to supply Fort Sumpter with provisions only, and that if such attempt be not resisted, no effort to throw in men, arms, or ammunition, will be made." The South shunned Lincoln's attempt at peaceful negotiations and on April 11, the commander in charge of the batteries surrounding the harbor, General Pierre G. T. Beauregard, demanded that Union Major Robert Anderson, who was in charge of Fort Sumpter, surrender the fort. When surrender was refused, the Confederates began their attack on Fort Sumter on the morning of April 8. After a thirty-four-hour barrage, Union forces had no choice but to evacuate the fort. The war had begun. Nevertheless, Lincoln

had masterfully presented the Union as inoffensive while allowing the South to take the first strike and become the aggressors and instigators of war.²²

Lincoln's expert handling of the Fort Sumter crisis had a unifying effect on the North. On April 15, 1861, Lincoln issued a proclamation that called for seventy-five thousand militia troops and beckoned for a special session of Congress to convene on July 4. Union men rushed to take a stand against the secessionist traitors in the South. Meanwhile, the crisis had a frenzied effect on the Southern states. In fact, in less than two months four additional slave states seceded from the Union and joined the Confederacy. In addition, the border states, Kentucky, Missouri, and Delaware refused to send militia troops at Lincoln's request. Likewise, railroad bridges and telegraph lines connecting Baltimore to the North were severed. Lincoln responded by taking bold actions. Not only did he expand the regular army by ten regiments, but he also ordered an extra eighteen thousand sailors to be enlisted as well and authorized the purchase of fifteen steamboats for the use of the Union Navy. Furthermore, he terminated mail service to all disloyal newspapers and publishers and suspended the writ of habeas corpus between Washington and Philadelphia. Controversially, Lincoln authorized two million dollars to be advanced by the Federal Treasury to a group of private citizens who would make payments on behalf of the war effort. In this way, Lincoln again illustrated his political cunning. He feared the government was infiltrated by those disloyal to the Union, therefore, by utilizing private citizens to make necessary war payments he was able to bypass normal government outlets.²³ The stage was set, and the war was in motion.

²² Striner, *Father Abraham*, 127; McPherson, *Abraham Lincoln*, 31; Simon Cameron to Robert S. Chew, 6 April 1861, LOC, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms000001.mss30189a0882700>; Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln*, 267; Donald, *Lincoln*, 292-293.

²³ Striner, *Father Abraham*, 130; Daniel Farber, *Lincoln's Constitution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 117.

All the while, in typical fashion, Lincoln remained largely concerned with the legality of his action. Thus, on July 4, 1861, Lincoln addressed Congress concerning the turmoil at Fort Sumter and his resulting actions. To Lincoln, the war was still not a conflict between two separate nations but an insurrection within the Union. Lincoln still held that there existed no legal basis for secession and that the Union was perpetually inseparable. Therefore, in his message to Congress, he reproached this illegality, stating, “a formula for instituting a combined government of these states had been promulgated; and this illegal organization, in the character of confederate States was already invoking recognition, aid, and intervention, from Foreign Powers.” Thereby, Lincoln defended the strident actions he had taken in the absence of Congressional approval on the grounds that he believed it to be his duty to prevent such a bold attempt to destroy the Union. Then, Lincoln once again illustrated his strong support of the Union’s democratic form of government, declaring, “this issue embraces more than the fate of these United States. It presents to the whole family of man, the question, whether a constitutional republic, or a democracy- a government of the people, by the same people -can, or cannot, maintain its territorial integrity, against its own domestic foes.” Lincoln knew that the United States government was the world’s archetype for self-government, and he believed that if the “fragile experiment” failed it was likely that it would “put an end to free government upon the earth.” Subsequently, any acknowledgment of the South as a foreign nation would indicate the end of the Union.²⁴ Consequently, two things remained imperative to Lincoln, holding together the Union and ending slavery.

²⁴ Donald, *Lincoln*, 302; Abraham Lincoln, Message to Congress in Special Session, 4 July 1861, House Divided Collection, <https://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/40391>; Lincoln, Message to Congress in Special Session, House Divided Collection.<https://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/40391>; McPherson, *Abraham Lincoln: and the Second American Revolution*, 115.

Nonetheless, the radical actions the new president had taken were as significant as they were strategic. Notably, Lincoln's political beliefs had originated in the Whig Party, which had favored a more moderate use of presidential power. Yet, with his actions, Lincoln had challenged the customary scope of presidential power. In addition to his controversial step of suspending the writ of habeas corpus, Lincoln had done something even more divisive when, on April 19, he had declared a blockade of Southern ports. Even his call for a special session of Congress had been symbolic as well as deliberate. For one thing, setting the date for Congress to convene for July 4, referenced the nation's birth. For another, it provided Lincoln with more time to regulate war policy before Congress would have the opportunity to intercede. Still, Lincoln maintained and defended the legality and necessity of his actions. Although there were those who disagreed with Lincoln's drastic use of executive power, such as Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger Taney who candidly spoke out against it, there were even more who supported it. For example, Attorney General Edward Bates wrote to Lincoln on April 5, 1861, expressing his approval of the president's actions saying, "The power to do these things is in the hand of the President, placed there by the Constitution and the Statute law, as a sacred trust, to be used by him, in his best discretion, in the performance of his great first duty- to preserve, protect and defend, the Constitution." Further approval came from Congress itself, which approved nearly all of the president's decrees, save the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus, and sanctioned even more funds and troops than Lincoln had requested.²⁵

No matter the legality of Lincoln's actions, or his political genius, he was not immune to mistakes, nor did he escape repercussions for them. Lincoln's April 19 blockade proclamation

²⁵ Farber, *Lincoln's Constitution*, 116-120; Edward Bates to Abraham Lincoln, 5 July 1861, LOC, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms000001.mss30189a.1065200>; Donald, *Lincoln*, 305.

had been a diplomatic blunder. Unfortunately, for Lincoln, the president could only close the Southern ports, not obstruct them. By declaring a blockade, Lincoln had driven foreign powers to recognize the Confederacy as a legitimate belligerent, which meant the South was allowed to buy weapons and obtain loans from foreign countries. This was exactly the kind of recognition of the South's legitimacy as a separate nation that Lincoln was desperately trying to avoid. Yet, Lincoln learned a valuable lesson from the ordeal and knew he could not make the same mistake in his efforts toward emancipation. Therefore, on May 23, when a politician turned Union General, Benjamin Butler issued noteworthy orders concerning treating escaped slaves as "contraband of war," Lincoln allowed the orders to stand but went no further with the idea for the time being. Lincoln's plans for slavery were temporarily put on hold, at least publicly, while he focused his attention on military matters.²⁶

In addition to his mistakes, Lincoln worried he was ill-equipped to serve as head of the military, especially in comparison to his Confederate counterpart, Jefferson Davis. Davis was a West Point Graduate, had served as a commander in the Mexican-American War, and had previously acted as the U.S. Secretary of War for four years. On the other hand, Lincoln had merely acted as a commander of a ragtag group of militiamen during the Black Hawk War of 1832, in which his regiment saw no real military action. Fortunately for Lincoln and for the Union, he was an excellent strategist driven to restore the Union. Thus, he visualized the Confederate Army as an obstacle to this goal that had to be forcefully subdued. Moreover, Lincoln pragmatically recognized the North's advantages regarding numbers, materials, and sea power, without overestimating such advantages. Regardless, Lincoln took his role as

²⁶ Allen Guelzo, *Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 39; Striner, *Father Abraham*, 139.

Commander in Chief extremely seriously, studying countless books on military tactics, conferring with his inner circle, and dedicating himself to the task.²⁷

Although the diplomacy of war was fragile, concerns regarding slavery remained a pressing issue, not just for Lincoln, but for the nation as well. Despite General Butler's orders to treat escaped slaves as contraband, no official policy existed on what Union soldiers should do with the escaped slaves they encountered in the South. While Democrats such as Kentucky Senator John J. Crittenden, and Tennessee Senator Andrew Johnson, the only Senator from a Confederate state who had declined resignation from the U.S. Senate upon his state's secession, argued that slavery should not be interfered with and that the fugitive slave law still applied even to the seceded states; republicans disagreed. Regardless, the dispute was settled by Congress on August 6, 1861, with the passing of the First Confiscation Act. Lincoln's views on the matter were influenced by his interpretations of secession, which meant that he believed that a state's legal status was dependent upon its presence in the Union. Therefore, a state had no other legal standing outside of the Union. Yet, since Lincoln viewed secession as illegal, he viewed the withdrawn states, not as succeeded, but as in rebellion, meaning they still lawfully remained in the Union. As a result, Lincoln struggled with whether the Confiscation Act was lawful. Moreover, following the recent battle, and Union loss, at Bull Run, he feared threatening the South would be unwise. Still, radicals argued the North could utilize confiscation as a weapon to weaken the Confederacy. Unceremoniously, Lincoln signed the act.²⁸

Following the First Confiscation Act, Lincoln's uncertainty about how to address the emancipation issue was evident. For instance, when Major General John C. Fremont declared

²⁷ Striner, *Father Abraham*, 134; Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln*, 66-67; Striner, *Father Abraham*, 134-135.

²⁸ Striner, *Father Abraham*, 140-143; Guelzo, *Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation*, 40-41.

martial law in the state of Missouri on August 30, 1861, and proceeded to decree the slaves within the state to be henceforth forever free, Lincoln quickly descended Fremont's order and responded to him directly. Lincoln petitioned Fremont to modify his declaration and adhere to the Confiscation Act passed by Congress on August 6. In his letter to Fremont, Lincoln wrote, "this letter is written in a spirit of caution and not of censure." It was not Lincoln's disapproval of emancipation that urged him to rescind Fremont's order, but his fear it might insight retaliation from Southerners or drive Missouri and the other border states to secession. On September 22, Lincoln wrote to Orville H. Browning concerning the matter. In the letter, Lincoln defended his action to withdraw Fremont's order writing that the order was "not within the range of military law, or necessity," and that "If the General needs [slaves] he can seize them, and use them; but when the need is past, it is not for him to fix their permanent future condition."²⁹ Lincoln understood Fremont's decree to be a political move that the public was not ready for. Thus, despite his own desire for emancipation, Lincoln knew it was not yet time for such a drastic step.

Once more Lincoln's talent as a strategist held him from moving against slavery too quickly. He recognized that moving too fast on the emancipation issue would destroy his political reputation and have damming consequences for the war effort. The timing had to be perfect, and the public had to be ready. Therefore, he initiated the phase-out of slavery in measured steps. In March of 1862, Lincoln proposed a resolution of gradual emancipation to Congress. He reasoned that the South held the hope that other slaveholding border states would join them in building a nation built upon slavery, especially if Confederate independence was

²⁹ Striner, *Father Abraham*, 143; Abraham Lincoln to John Fremont, 2 September 1861, House Divided Collection, <https://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/40442>; Guelzo, *Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation*, 45; Abraham Lincoln to Orville H. Browning, 22 September 1861, LOC, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms000001.mss> 30189a.1192600.

recognized. However, if the states were to “initiate emancipation... the more Northern shall, by such initiation, convince make it thus certain to the more Southern, that in no event, will the former ever join the latter, in their proposed confederacy.” Then, on April 16, Lincoln finally achieved what he had endeavored to accomplish since 1837, the abolishment of slavery in the District of Columbia. Finally, the nation’s capital was emancipated. Lincoln pushed forward and on July 12, he proposed gradual emancipation with compensation to delegates from Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, Missouri, Tennessee, and Western Virginia. Unfortunately, his petition failed to win the votes it needed to be passed and was rejected.³⁰

However, as the war progressed further into 1862, Lincoln realized the time for emancipation was rapidly approaching. Not only were Congressional radicals ripe for emancipation, but more and more of the public began to call for a presidential decree on the issue. For example, on June 20, 1862, Lincoln received a letter from H.G. Woodworth containing resolutions from the Wisconsin Free Will Baptists. The letter sought justice for the slaves reading, “emancipation immediate emancipation be the not only implied but avowed policy of this great and professedly free people Sir we are ready for this.” Another letter calling for emancipation reached Lincoln on September 8. This one came from a group of Chicago citizens including Reverend William W. Patton, pleading with Lincoln that “the only means of preserving the Union, to proclaim without delay National Emancipation.” Moreover, as the Union army drove further South the war was wreaking havoc on slavery in the Confederate states. The arrival of the Union Army into new territories inspired slaves to escape and flee to Union lines. Soon, Union officers found themselves employing an unprecedented number of

³⁰ Abraham Lincoln to Congress, February-March 1862, LOC, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms000001.mss> 30189a.1481000; Abraham Lincoln to Congress, 16 April 1862, LOC, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms000001.mss> 30189a.1554100; Harold Holzer, *Emancipating Lincoln: The Proclamation in Text, Context, and Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 72.

black refugees, many of whom provided the North with intelligence regarding Southern supplies, secret routes, and related information. In addition, as Union soldiers encountered slavery firsthand, their sentiments regarding slavery began to shift in favor of emancipation out of outrage at the treatment of slaves.³¹

By July of 1862, with the war in full swing and support for emancipation growing, Lincoln was prepared for emancipation. On July 13, Lincoln met with delegates from the border states to discuss his plans for gradual emancipation with compensation. The following day, Lincoln confessed to Secretary of the Navy Gideon Wells, that he felt the time had come for a presidential decree of emancipation. Then, on July 17, the Second Confiscation Act was signed into law. This act expanded on the first. Significantly, the act contained a radical provision; all slaves belonging to Confederate masters that came into Union lines were instantly and forever free. Meanwhile, Lincoln already had covert plans for a much more radical piece of legislation. Thus, five days later, on July 22, Lincoln shared with his cabinet his official draft for an executive order of emancipation. The order would give the rebels the rest of the year to lay down their weapons and end their rebellion, or they would face devastating consequences in regard to the future of slavery.³²

Yet, in typical Lincoln fashion, he strategically made no public notice of his decision until months later. In the meantime, he received strong support and equally strong opposition to his plans. In fact, one of the most debated letters Lincoln authored was written during this time. On August 22, 1862, he wrote to Horace Greenly in response to a public letter Greenly had

³¹ H.G. Woodworth to Abraham Lincoln, 20 June 1862, LOC, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms000001.mss> 30189a.1654600; Chicago Citizens to Abraham Lincoln, 8 September 1862, LOC, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms000001.mss> 30189a.1828400; Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 208-209.

³² Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 216-217; Striner, *Father Abraham*, 171; Abraham Lincoln, Emancipation Proclamation First Draft, Washington, DC, 22 July 1862, House Divided Collection, <https://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/40362>.

published specifically addressing Lincoln in the *New York Tribune* on August 20. In the letter to Greenly, Lincoln plainly stated that his utmost object was to save the Union. Further, Lincoln stated, “if I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that.” This particular letter is noteworthy due to the fact many historians have used it as evidence of Lincoln’s reluctance or indecisiveness toward slavery. However, this is a misconception. For one thing, Lincoln ends the letter by stating, “I have here stated my purpose according to my view of official duty; and I intend no modification of my oft-expressed personal wish that all men every where could be free.” It was now *dutifully* imperative to Lincoln that he save the Union because of the role he took on as president. However, it had always been *personally* imperative to him that he end slavery. Additionally, Lincoln was strictly faithful to ensuring the lawfulness of every action he took against slavery. Moreover, as usual, Lincoln carefully chose his words to accommodate his audience. By promoting his duties as president before his personal conviction, Lincoln was preparing the North for the decree of emancipation he was already planning.³³ Lincoln had never swayed from his anti-slavery ideals, this was yet another exceptionally strategic political maneuver made by Lincoln. From then on, Lincoln remained resolute; emancipation was coming.

Subsequently, on September 22, 1862, Lincoln introduced his preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. Immediately, Lincoln received exuberant feedback from antislavery supporters in response to his emancipation plans. For instance, on September 23, John Allison thanked the president writing, “permit me to express my unfeigned thanks for the Proclamation announcing

³³ Abraham Lincoln to Horace Greenly, Washington, DC, 22 August 1862, House Divided Collection, <https://housedivided.dickinson.edu/sites/lincoln/letter-to-horace-greeley-august-22-1862/>; Striner, *Father Abraham*, 177; Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 229.

your purpose... they will rejoice at this new manifestation of the determination upon your part to save to the People.” That same day, Lincoln received another letter of praise from Preston King stating, “You have made me very glad to day in reading your Proclamation which reached here this morning.” Lincoln even received support from the border states. On December 31, Green Adams a lawyer and Congress member from Kentucky wrote, “For God’s sake, stand by the proclamation- No taking back... the people will stand by you the Good men of Kentucky will stand by you.” In a letter from Vice President Hannibal Hamlin to Lincoln on September 25, Hamlin expressed his gratitude in words that continue to ring true even today, “[the emancipation proclamation] will stand as the great act of the age... It will be enthusiastically approved and sustained and future generations will, as I do, say God bless you for the great and noble act.”³⁴ Hamlin was right, Lincoln’s proclamation would stand as a truly great act of the age.

Simultaneously, Lincoln’s proclamation caused immense backlash. For one thing, the proclamation jeopardized the fragile professional alliance that existed between Democrats, Republicans, and delegates from the border states. For another, it threatened to stir up insurrection within the Union Military. Moreover, it endangered Lincoln’s administration, as many feared it would cause disloyalty in the border states. Unsurprisingly, reactions to the proclamation within the Confederacy were all negative.³⁵

Nevertheless, on January 1, 1863, Lincoln signed the final draft of the Emancipation Proclamation. In the proclamation, Lincoln declared that for the states of the Confederacy “all

³⁴ John Allison to Abraham Lincoln, 23 September 1862, LOC, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms000001.mss> 30189a.1857600; Preston King to Abraham Lincoln, 23 September 1862, LOC, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms000001.mss> 30189a.1859100; Green Adams to Abraham Lincoln, 31 December 1862, LOC, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms000001.mss> 30189a.4244200; Hannibal Hamlin to Abraham Lincoln, 25 September 1862, LOC, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms000001.mss> 30189a.4235300.

³⁵ Donald, *Lincoln*, 377-379.

persons held as slaves within said designated States, and parts of States, are, and henceforward shall be free.” He then added, “that the Executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons.”³⁶ With that, Lincoln had not only permanently broken the institution the Confederates were fighting to maintain, but he had also irrevocably tied the war to emancipation. Although there was still much work to be done, Lincoln had succeeded. He had struck a death blow to slavery; it was dying, and the war had become a war for freedom.

Ultimately, critics argue Lincoln’s proclamation freed no one. However, this claim is dubious, and according to historian James McPherson it “completely misses the point.” In the end, it is undeniable that the proclamation’s effects were unprecedented and revolutionary. It paved the way for the thirteenth amendment. It struck a great blow to the Confederacy. By destroying slavery, it destroyed the entire social structure of the South. It granted African Americans the opportunity to join the fight for the freedom of their own race. This in turn provided more troops to Union ranks, which already outnumbered their Confederate counterparts. It ended the promise of compensation for emancipation and Lincoln’s public support of colonization. Furthermore, it forever altered the war, changing it from the suppression of a rebellion into a war for the liberation of four million slaves. As a result, since the nations of Europe had already abolished slavery in their own countries, it shattered Confederate prospects of foreign recognition and aid.³⁷ The Emancipation Proclamation was the necessary first step toward freedom and equality. For Lincoln, it was his greatest achievement. Nonetheless, in order

³⁶ Abraham Lincoln, Emancipation Proclamation, Washington DC, 1 January 1863, House Divided Collection, <https://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/40363>.

³⁷McPherson, *Abraham Lincoln: and the Second American Revolution*, 34-35; Michael Vorenberg, *The Emancipation Proclamation: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2010), 14-19.

for Lincoln's proclamation to secure the irreversible end of slavery, the Union would have to win the war.

Fortunately for the Union, Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation included a provision regarding the acceptance of freedmen into military service. This admittance of African Americans into the military gave the Union forces an even greater advantage over their Confederate counterparts. In fact, by the end of the war, African Americans made up about 10 percent of the entire Union forces and totaled 180,000 men. This group was largely made up of emancipated slaves. Nevertheless, military service posed an incentive for enslaved men from the border states, where the Emancipation Proclamation did not apply, as it offered them a legal path to earn their freedom. For Lincoln, African American soldiers were the key to Union victory. In fact, in March 1863, Lincoln wrote to Southern Unionist Governor Andrew Johnson concerning the importance of raising a black regiment. In the letter, Lincoln urged, "the colored population is the great available, and yet unavailed of, force, for restoring the Union." That same month, Lincoln wrote a similar letter to Brigadier General Nathaniel P. Banks, imploring him to raise a black regiment. In this letter, Lincoln insisted, "to now avail ourselves of this element of force is very important, if not indispensable. I therefore will thank you to help... as much, and as rapidly as you can... the necessity of this is palpable."³⁸ Lincoln knew the best way to strike at the Confederacy was by utilizing the African American population.

More than assisting the Union war effort, black soldiers began to shape the future status of African Americans in society. For example, military courts began treating black soldiers as legal equals. For the first time, African Americans were allowed to testify against whites.

³⁸ Abraham Lincoln to Andrew Johnson, 26 March 1863, LOC, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms000001.mss30189a.2263800>; Abraham Lincoln to Nathaniel P. Banks, 29 March 1863, LOC, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms000001.mss30189a.2270300>.

Consequently, African American soldiers began pressing for equality, especially with regard to wages and treatment. In fact, black soldiers took their complaints regarding these issues to the newspapers, formed petitions, and eventually turned to Lincoln and Congress with their concerns. Ultimately, Congress would respond favorably to the appeal for equal pay. In 1864, Congress approved retroactive pay equality to the time of enlistment for black soldiers who had been born free, and retroactive pay equality to the beginning of 1864 for those who had been former slaves. As for Lincoln, in July of 1863, he signed a military order regarding the treatment of African American soldiers. The order warned that the selling or enslavement of captured Union soldiers based on their skin color by Confederate forces would constitute retaliation on Confederate prisoners at the hands of Union soldiers. It went on to warn that for every Union prisoner killed a Confederate soldier would likewise be executed, and for every Union soldier sold into slavery a Confederate prisoner would be put to hard labor.³⁹ African American military service was proving useful to blacks establishing a new status in the social hierarchy. Unfortunately, these advancements were not without backlash and retaliation from Confederate forces.

In battle, Confederate soldiers doled out heinous forms of retribution on black soldiers and their white superior officers. Serving as one example, in April 1864, a massacre of surrendering black Union soldiers occurred at the hands of Confederate troops under the command of Nathan B. Forrest. During this massacre, women, children, and wounded were all executed by the Confederates. The total devastation equaled in the range of 450 to 500 lives lost. Following the massacre, Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy, wrote to Lincoln urging him to take action. Welles wrote, “it is the duty of the government to protect its soldiers from butchery

³⁹ Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 252-254; Striner, *Father Abraham*, 204.

when captured, no matter what may be their color... the government should, therefore, interpose, and spare no exertions to prevent a repetition of the outrage.” Lincoln’s response to this massacre was measured and precise. Instead of the eye-for-an-eye retaliation he had promised, Lincoln took a more political approach to counter the devastation. Subsequently, he suspended the prisoner-of-war exchange that had existed between the Union and Confederacy. Since July 1862, prisoners had been exchanged on an equal basis, one Union soldier for one Confederate soldier, or one officer for an enemy officer. Now, Lincoln ended these peaceful fair exchanges until the Confederacy agreed to include black soldiers equally in the exchange. Meaning, the Confederates would have to recognize a black soldier as an equal to a white soldier. The Confederate government refused and would not relent until early 1865. By then, it would be too late to make much of a difference.⁴⁰

In the meantime, while Lincoln was busy acting as commander-in-chief trying to navigate the war, he was also busy preparing himself for the upcoming election and with plans for reconstruction following the end of the war. Lincoln feared failing to be reelected in 1864. He feared losing all the antislavery progress he had made in the case of a Democratic victory in the upcoming election. Lincoln worried that the military stalemate along with the dissatisfaction of War Democrats and conservates Republicans regarding his antislavery policies would cause him to lose the 1864 election to General George McClellan. If this was to be the case, Lincoln worried that McClellan would agree to an armistice with the Confederacy, thus legitimizing the independence of the Confederacy and ending all hope of preserving the Union and dismantling slavery. As late as August 1864, Lincoln wrote a memorandum to his cabinet, asserting, “it

⁴⁰ George S. Burkhardt, *Confederate Rage, Yankee Wrath: No Quarter in the Civil War* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007), 109-117; Gideon Welles to Abraham Lincoln, 5 May 1864, LOC, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms000001.mss30189a.3288800>; Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 255.

seems exceedingly probable that this Administration will not be re-elected. Then it will be my duty to so co-operate with the President elect, as to save the Union between the election and the inauguration; as he will have secured his election on such ground that he can not possibly save it afterwards.”⁴¹ Lincoln feared time was running out and that his proclamation may not be enough to prevent a new administration from conceding or compromising on the issue of slavery.

All the while, many of Lincoln’s supporters attempted to sway Lincoln’s resolute adherence to the idea that there could be no peace without the abolishment of slavery. Those in Lincoln’s ear were urging him to reconsider, to make concessions in order to end the war quickly and secure his future reelection. In February 1864, as Lincoln was receiving both support and opposition for his reelection, he received a letter warning him, “we want Lincoln reelected and there is no doubt that he will be if the war is pushed on with vigor and with prospective early termination, but if it is allowed to drag along... the result will be much more doubtful.”

Likewise, an article in the April 1, 1864, edition of *The Liberator* newspaper condemned “the present administration” for “infringement on state and individual rights” and called for “a speedy suppression of the rebellion, the cessation of bloodshed, and the maintenance of the Union.” It seemed the people were desperate for peace by any means necessary. Nevertheless, Lincoln refused to back down on the issue of emancipation. For Lincoln, the abolishment of slavery was a condition he refused to concede no matter what it cost him.⁴²

With this on his mind, Lincoln traveled to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania in November 1863, following the horrific battle that had taken place there July 1-3 of that year. The battle had

⁴¹ Striner, *Father Abraham*, 190; Abraham Lincoln, 23 August 1864, LOC, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms000001.mss30189a.4359700>.

⁴² Jon Mecham, *And Then There Was Light: Abraham Lincoln and the American Struggle* (New York: Random House, 2022), 333; Ezra Graves to Abraham Lincoln, 26 February 1864, LOC, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms000001.mss30189a.3099400>; *The Liberator*, 1 April 1864, LOC, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms000001.mss30189a.3201500>; Mecham, *And Then There Was Light*, 335-337.

claimed the lives of 50,000 Confederate and Union soldiers and a National Cemetery was being dedicated as a result. Lincoln, once more illustrating his political brilliance, seized this opportunity to remind the people what was at stake and to recommit the nation to the ideals of liberty and equality. Lincoln's speech was short but heartfelt. With his words, Lincoln simultaneously invoked the Constitution and the spirit of America's founding fathers. He began with the words, "four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, upon this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal," and he ended with the assurance, "that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."⁴³ Lincoln was declaring to the nation, that this war was a war of emancipation, of freedom, of equality, and of preservation and that there was no going back.

Despite his misgivings regarding the election, Lincoln, ever concerned with legality and Constitutionality, refused to postpone or forgo the election, despite members of his cabinet urging him to do so. For Lincoln, the only way to ensure democracy survived was to adhere to its system. He believed postponing the election would only mean admitting the Confederacy had already conquered the Union. Lincoln voiced these opinions in defense of his decision, he wrote, "We can not have free government without elections; and if the rebellion could force us to forego, or postpone a national election, it might fairly claim to have already conquered and ruined us." In addition, Lincoln knew the only way to truly know if he and his actions had the approval of the people, was to let them vote.⁴⁴ Though it was in direct opposition to his own

⁴³ Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address, 19 November 1863, House Divided Collection, <https://housedivided.dickinson.edu/sites/lincoln/gettysburg-address-november-19-1863/>.

⁴⁴ Mechem, *And Then There Was Light*, 319; Abraham Lincoln, Response to Serenade, 10 November 1864, House Divided Collection, <https://housedivided.dickinson.edu/sites/lincoln/response-to-serenade-november-10-1864/>.

political security, Lincoln remained true to upholding the democratic system he was so desperately trying to save.

Ultimately, it would seem Lincoln did have the support of the people after all. Lincoln won the 1864 presidential election in a landslide. His opposition, George McClellan gained only three states, Kentucky, Delaware, and New Jersey. Meanwhile, in the electoral college, Lincoln gained 212 votes, while McClellan gained only 21. Upon his victory, Lincoln received a telegraph reading simply, “George Washington made the Republic. Abraham Lincoln will save it.”⁴⁵ It was decided, Lincoln’s fight was not yet over.

In the meantime, Lincoln had been piecing together his postwar plans for the Confederate states. On December 8, 1863, Lincoln had issued a proclamation declaring a full pardon to the states in rebellion that wished to rescind their rebellious position and reenter the Union. He agreed to fully pardon and restore such states given they agreed to adhere to his previous emancipation of enslaved individuals, so long as every person agreed to take an oath to uphold and protect the Constitution. Lincoln further declared that if one-tenth of a seceded state’s population voted and took the aforementioned oath, that state would be readmitted to the Union under a Republican form of state government. This ten-percent plan, which would receive backlash as being too lenient on Southern rebels, was actually ingenious. By allowing states to reenter the Union based on only ten percent of the voters, Lincoln was setting a way to easily change the states’ constitutions to that of free constitutions thus quickly creating more free states.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Striner, *Father Abraham*, 244; James M. Scovel to Abraham Lincoln, 9 November 1864, LOC, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms000001.mss30189a.3809700>.

⁴⁶ Abraham Lincoln, Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction, 8 December 1863, House Divided Collection, <https://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/40452>; Striner, *Father Abraham*, 220.

Furthermore, Lincoln, ever the political strategist, had, in 1863, quietly begun pushing for emancipation on a state-by-state basis beginning with Union-occupied Southern states. Therefore, as the newly assembled pro-Union state governments of occupied Louisiana and Tennessee began negotiations to return to the Union, Lincoln cunningly worked behind the scenes to advocate and ensure the states reentered the Union as free states. This free-state initiative did not stop with the Southern slave states, and in 1863, the free-state fervor caused the Maryland state government to convene to reconstitute the state based on an antislavery constitution. Likewise, in the spring of 1864, he pushed his free-state movement in Arkansas and by March the state had adopted a redrafted constitution based on emancipation. In addition, several border states began attaching Reconstruction to the abolition of slavery. Nevertheless, not all Union-occupied slave states, or border states for that matter, supported abolition. In fact, Kentucky and Delaware refused to legally give up slavery until the ratification of the thirteenth Amendment in 1865.⁴⁷

As for the future of African Americans in society, this subject weighed heavy on Lincoln's mind. He had long supported African American colonization, thinking it was the only way blacks could obtain a fair and racism-free future. Yet, the reality of blacks in the military changed this thinking. Lincoln realized by fighting for the Union, blacks were securing their place in a postwar nation. Therefore, in the spring of 1863, he had begun supporting the creation of jobs for African Americans on seized plantations. In addition, in the summer of 1862, a tax act had been passed by Congress that legalized the confiscation of real estate within the Confederate states due to the nonpayment of taxes. Subsequently, in February 1863, with Lincoln's approval, Congress passed an amendment to this act. This amendment allowed federal agents to reserve a

⁴⁷ Striner, *Father Abraham*, 205-207, 220; Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 274.

portion of this seized real estate for altruistic purposes. As a result, the land would be sold to former slaves. Thus, the same individuals who had been enslaved on that property would now have a chance to own the very land they had been forced to work for their masters. The rest of the confiscated real estate was auctioned off to investors who instituted pay-to-work programs employing former slaves.⁴⁸ Lincoln was doing his best to pave the way for African American citizenship and land ownership.

This concern for the future of blacks only deepened in 1864. In fact, Lincoln quietly pushed for black suffrage in writing to the newly elected governor of the now-free state of Louisiana, after blacks had been excluded from voting in the state elections in February of that year. In the letter, Lincoln suggested, “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.” Of course, in typical Lincoln fashion, he tempered his words as a mild suggestion as to appear none too aggressive in his approach. Nonetheless, Lincoln wholeheartedly supported black suffrage, and by January of 1864 had twice given his support of including freeborn African Americans as voters in Louisiana. Finally, on September 5, 1864, Louisiana ratified its new constitution. The constitution not only solidified the permanence of emancipation within the state, but it also arranged for a new public school system that would be open to both whites and blacks and conferred the possibility of black suffrage. Moreover, in the spring of that same year, Lincoln had already begun work on civil rights legislation that would end racial discrimination on streetcars in D.C., raise the wages of black troops, and allow African Americans to testify in

⁴⁸ Striner, *Father Abraham*, 193-194.

Federal court. Lincoln's hard work for emancipation and, his plans for the future of the Union were finally starting to come to fruition.⁴⁹

At the beginning of 1865, things were looking brighter for Lincoln and for the Union. The Union Army was seemingly at an advantage in the war and had won several decisive and important battles. Meanwhile, Lincoln was busy advocating the Thirteenth Amendment to Congress. The amendment had passed in the Senate in April 1864; however, it had failed to pass in the House in June of that year. In December, Lincoln, knowing the reconvening Congress would be reconsidering the amendment, interceded more bluntly than he had any with any other legislation of his career. Behind the scenes, he made arrangements and used his influence to deal with those he feared would oppose the amendment. He even warned that if the amendment did not pass, he would call a special session of Congress in March 1865. The special session was not necessary as all of Lincoln's work paid off. On January 31, the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was passed. Finally, Lincoln had secured the legal security that slavery would be abolished.⁵⁰

The following month, more and more liberties were secured for blacks. For instance, the day after the Thirteenth Amendment had been passed, the first black lawyer was permitted to practice in front of the Supreme Court. Only days later, the first black minister was allowed to preach in the hall of the House of Representatives. In addition, the appointment of the first black commissioned officer was approved that month by Lincoln himself. Most incredibly, Northern states, beginning with Illinois, began repealing their state's Black Laws. By the end of 1865, all these discriminatory laws would be removed from Northern law books. Then, at the beginning of

⁴⁹ Abraham Lincoln to Michael Hahn, 13 March 1864, LOC, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms000001.mss30189a.3153000>; Cox, *Lincoln and Black Freedom*, 76-77; Striner, *Father Abraham*, 219-222.

⁵⁰ Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 312-313.

March, Lincoln established the Freedmen's Bureau. The bureau was established to offer assistance to newly freed persons with medical, educational, and legal matters.⁵¹ The change Lincoln had been fighting for was well on its way.

On March 4, 1865, Lincoln gave his Second Inaugural Address. Notably, half the audience in attendance was black. Lincoln's Thirteenth Amendment symbolized that the rebuilding of the nation would be based on freedom for all. In his address, Lincoln expressed the hope that the war was coming to a close. Nevertheless, he conveyed the ever-present dedication to and unwillingness to sway from his cause saying, "if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword... so still it must be."⁵² So the war raged on.

Then, on April 3, 1865, incredible news reached Washington's War Department; Richmond, the heart of the confederacy, had been captured. The next day, despite the possibility of danger to his life, Lincoln visited the fallen Confederate capital. During this visit, Lincoln was surrounded by an ever-growing crowd of African Americans who praised him as their liberator. In the wake of their adoration, Lincoln remained humble. Then, on April 9, with Lincoln safely back in Washington, the moment the nation had been waiting for since the early days of 1861 finally came. General of the Confederate forces, Robert E. Lee, surrendered at Appomattox Court House, in Virginia. The conflict that had ravaged and fragmented the nation was over, and the Union had won.⁵³

⁵¹ Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 317; Striner, *Father Abraham*, 251.

⁵² Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 323; Abraham Lincoln, Second Inaugural Address, Washington, DC, 4 March 1865, House Divided Collection, <https://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/40368>.

⁵³ Kearns, *Team of Rivals*, 117-719; Striner, *Father Abraham*, 253.

Two days later, Abraham Lincoln delivered the last speech of his life. In this speech, Lincoln praised the Union forces and celebrated the rejoining of the nation. Nevertheless, he looked toward the future in a realistic manner. He knew Reconstruction and reunion were not going to be easy feats. Of this endeavor, Lincoln asserted, “it is fraught with great difficulty... we simply must begin with, and mould from, disorganized and discordant elements.” Lincoln’s speech went on to discuss the future without any definitive claims, and even his ten-percent plan was up for reconsideration. The future of the Union, it seemed, was undecided.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, one thing was certain, the institution of slavery had been vanquished.

Unbeknownst to Lincoln, John Wilkes Booth was in attendance during this speech, listening and seething in the face of the proposition of black citizenship, Booth vowed that Lincoln had given his last speech. Consequently, on April 14, 1865, at Ford’s Theatre, Booth shot the president, mortally wounding him. Early the next morning, Lincoln was dead.⁵⁵

Unfortunately, the possibility of what Reconstruction under Lincoln’s administration would have looked like died with him. Instead, the critical time when civil rights reform could have been initiated was squandered on a political war between Radical Republicans and President Andrew Johnson. Johnson turned a blind eye as “black codes” began to permeate the South and when black voters were violently barred from casting votes. In addition, he vetoed a bill that would have extended the existence of the Freedmen’s Bureau. At every turn, Johnson worked to undermine Congress. Nonetheless, the Republicans pushed back, channeling Lincoln’s unwavering determination to black liberty, they managed to renew the Freedmen’s Bureau and pass the 1866 Civil Rights Act, which facilitated the passage of the Fourteenth and

⁵⁴ Abraham Lincoln, Last Speech, 11 April 1865, House Divided Collection, <https://housedivided.dickinson.edu/sites/lincoln/last-speech-april-11-1865/>.

⁵⁵ Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 332.

Fifteenth Amendments, ensuring civil rights and suffrage rights to blacks. In addition, Congress passed the Reconstruction Act of 1867, managing to bring African Americans into government offices including into Congress. Unfortunately, these advances were reversed as a counterrevolution swept through the South in the following decades.⁵⁶

Although, it is impossible to know what would have been accomplished had Lincoln survived, he most assuredly would have remained dedicated to black freedom and equality. Perhaps, the road to civil rights would have been smoother and such rights might have been obtained decades earlier. No matter what the nation would have looked like had Lincoln survived, the reality is that he did not. Lincoln had fought for emancipation, he had played the political long game, and he had won. Unfortunately, he did not live long enough to guide the broken nation through to its restoration. Nonetheless, Lincoln's relentless battle for the permanent assurance of emancipation, the condition of free-state constitutions, and the securing of rights for African Americans illustrate that Lincoln's desire for equality and freedom was as equally important to him as preserving the Union and securing the future of the democratic way. At any moment Lincoln could have conceded or compromised, he could have obtained peace on these grounds, nevertheless, he did not. Lincoln passionately fought for liberty and equality as well as the preservation of the Union.

Abraham Lincoln was a political mastermind. He remained dedicated to his antislavery ideals throughout his career and through his determination to the proposition that "all men are created equal," he was able to bring about the end of slavery and preserve the Union. Moreover, his Emancipation Proclamation remains one of the most revolutionary documents in American History. Every political move he made was deliberate, decisive, and most importantly to Lincoln,

⁵⁶ Striner, *Father Abraham*, 257; Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 334.

lawful. His strategic timing and meticulously chosen words have led many historians to misinterpret his character and his commitment to ending slavery. Nonetheless, Lincoln was the redeemer the nation needed in its darkest hour. He led the military through its bloodiest conflict, he held together a dividing nation, and even though it required his last full measure of devotion, he became the liberator of four million enslaved people.

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