



The New York Times Is Amazed by the Change in Public Opinion on Slavery (1864)

The New York Times printed the following editorial early in 1864 remarking on the change in popular attitudes toward the idea of gradual emancipation. Such changes demonstrated the war's corrosive effect on traditional ideas and assumptions.

No Gradual Emancipation.

A mass convention was held yesterday in Memphis, inaugurating a general movement in Tennessee for the reorganization of the civil government in the State. One of the features of the call, we observe, is that "emancipation immediate and unconditional is our best and only true policy." The Unionism of the State has settled firmly on that principle.

It is extraordinary how completely the idea of gradual emancipation has been dissipated from the public mind everywhere, by the progress of events. Before the rebellion, it was accounted the very extreme of Anti-Slavery fanaticism to believe in the possibility of immediate emancipation without social ruin. The wisest Anti-Slavery men of the day, whether in this country or in Europe, assumed it almost as an axiom that there could be no transition from Slavery to freedom without an apprenticeship, or some other arrangement that should deaden the shock. All of the acts of emancipation by England and the continental nations, and by our own Northern States, whenever they applied to more than a mere handful of slaves, were invariably

FROM *New York Times*, 25 February 1864.

ably based on that assumption. It took our own State not less than twenty-eight years to consume the gradual extinction of the system after the Emancipation Law was passed. Long after the rebellion opened, even when it had become a generally accepted fact that Slavery must come to an end, the idea still adhered that the emancipation must be gradual in order to be safe. President LINCOLN, in his recommendation to Congress of appropriations to induce the Border States to initiate a system of emancipation, was particular to make it apply only to *gradual* emancipation. Even so late as last June, the Missouri Convention passed its emancipation ordinance so framed that no slave should go free before 1870, and the younger ones not until long afterwards.

But all these gradual methods are now hardly more thought of than if they had been obsolete a century. The people of Missouri, through their Legislature, have convened another convention to make a complete end of Slavery without delay. In Maryland immediate emancipation is the order of the day. The convention to frame the Free State Constitution, which is to be elected on the last Wednesday of April, and to meet on the last Wednesday of the same month, will not think of adopting any other plan. In Louisiana, in Arkansas,



in Florida, and in fact wherever the purpose of emancipation is entertained at all, there seems to be an almost unanimous agreement that immediate emancipation is the wisest, and in fact the only practicable method.

The change of opinion on this subject is a remarkable illustration of the practical aptitude of the American mind. With hardly an effort, theories and prejudices, that had apparently rooted themselves in it so deeply as to become a part of it, are discarded, and new ideas, in keeping with a new condition of affairs, are conceived, and conformed to, almost by universal consent. It is recognized that whatever may be the advantage theoretically

of gradual over immediate emancipation, the actual situation permits no option between the two. Gradual emancipation is, in truth, no longer a debatable matter, for there is nothing really left to graduate. Slavery now exists only in name. Its subordinate has been destroyed by the terrible attrition of the war. . . . When the military arm once has played, there is no such thing as a gradual severance of the bond between the master and slave. The rupture is instantaneous, and complete, and permanent. To undertake to renew the relation between master and slave for the sake of destroying it more scientifically would be only to prolong social confusion, and work unmingled evil to both races.

Party Platforms in 1864

Below are the platforms of the two major parties that were adopted for the 1864 presidential campaign. As Lincoln wanted, the Republican (Union) platform endorsed the proposed constitutional amendment to abolish slavery throughout the United States, which was still pending in Congress. The most controversial plank of the Democratic platform, which produced great resentment among the troops, was the one that termed the war a "failure" and called for an armistice and peace negotiations with the Confederacy. This statement was written by Clement Vallandigham, an Ohio delegate and the leader of the peace wing of the Democratic party, who earlier had been banished to the Confederacy for disloyalty (see p. 170). Although after much indecision George McClellan, the Democratic presidential nominee, declined to endorse the idea of an armistice, Republicans nevertheless seized upon the platform to accuse the Democratic party of disloyalty and support for disunion.

The 1864 Republican Platform

1. *Resolved*, That it is the highest duty of every American citizen to maintain against all their enemies the integrity of the Union, and the permanent

FROM Edward Stanwood, *A History of Presidential Elections* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1896), pp. 237-43.

authority of the Constitution and laws of the United States; and that, laying aside all differences of political opinion, we pledge ourselves as Union men, animated by a common sentiment, and aiming at a common object, to do everything in our power to aid the government in quelling by force of arms the rebellion now raging against its authority, and in bringing to the punishment due to

leaded difficulty, the great duties and responsibilities of the presidential office; that we approve and endorse, as demanded by the emergency and essential to the preservation of the nation and as within the provisions of the Constitution, the measures and acts which he has adopted to defend the nation against its open and secret foes; that we approve, especially, the proclamation of emancipation and the employment as Union soldiers of men heretofore held in slavery; and that we have full confidence in his determination to carry these and all other constitutional measures essential to the salvation of the country into full and complete effect.

6. *Resolved*, That we deem it essential to the general welfare that 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.

7. *Resolved*, That the government owes to all men employed in its armies, without regard to distinction of color, the full protection of the laws of war; and that any violation of these laws, or of the usages of civilized nations in time of war, by the rebels now in arms, should be made the subject of prompt and full redress.

8. *Resolved*, That foreign immigration, which in the past has added so much to the wealth, development of resources, and increase of power to this nation,—the asylum of the oppressed of all nations,—should be fostered and encouraged by a liberal and just policy.

9. *Resolved*, That we are in favor of a speedy construction of the railroad to the Pacific coast.

10. *Resolved*, That the national faith, pledged for the redemption of the public debt, must be kept inviolate, and that for this purpose we recommend economy and rigid responsibility in the public expenditures, and a vigorous and just system of taxation; and that it is the duty of every loyal State to sustain the credit and promote the use of the national currency.

11. *Resolved*, That we approve the position taken by the government, that the people of the United States can never regard with indifference

their crimes the rebels and traitors arrayed against it.

2. *Resolved*, That we approve the determination of the government of the United States not to compromise with rebels, or to offer them any terms of peace, except such as may be based upon an unconditional surrender of their hostility and a return to their just allegiance to the Constitution and laws of the United States; and that we call upon the government to maintain this position, and to prosecute the war with the utmost possible vigor to the complete suppression of the rebellion, in full reliance upon the self-sacrificing patriotism, the heroic valor, and the undying devotion of the American people to their country and its free institutions.

3. *Resolved*, 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 defence, has aimed a deathblow at this gigantic evil, we are in favor, furthermore, of such 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.

4. *Resolved*, That the thanks of the American people are due to the soldiers and sailors of the army and navy who have perilled their lives in defence of their country and in vindication of the honor of its flag; that the nation owes to them some permanent recognition of their patriotism and their valor, and ample and permanent provision for those of their survivors who have received disabling and honorable wounds in the service of the country; and that the memories of those who have fallen in its defence shall be held in grateful and everlasting remembrance.

5. *Resolved*, That we approve and applaud the practical wisdom, the unselfish patriotism, and the unswerving fidelity with which Abraham Lincoln has discharged, under circumstances of unparalleled

the attempt of any European power to overthrow by force, or to supplant by fraud, the institutions of any republican government on the western continent; and that they will view with extreme jealousy, as menacing to the peace and independence of their own country, the efforts of any such power to obtain new footholds for monarchical governments, sustained by foreign military force, in near proximity to the United States.

The 1864 Democratic Platform

Resolved, That in the future, as in the past, we will adhere with unswerving fidelity to the Union under the Constitution as the only solid foundation of our strength, security, and happiness as a people, and as a framework of government equally conducive to the welfare and prosperity of all the States, both Northern and Southern.

Resolved, That this convention does explicitly declare, as the sense of the American people, that after four years of failure to restore the Union by the experiment of war, during which, under the pretence of a military necessity, or war power higher than the Constitution, the Constitution itself has been disregarded in every part, and public liberty and private right alike trodden down, and the material prosperity of the country essentially impaired,—justice, humanity, liberty, and the public welfare demand that immediate efforts be made for a cessation of hostilities, with a view to an ultimate convention of the States, or other peaceable means, to the end that, at the earliest practicable moment, peace may be restored on the basis of the Federal union of the States.

Resolved, That the direct interference of the military authorities of the United States in the recent elections held in Kentucky, Maryland, Mis-

souri, and Delaware was a shameful violation of the Constitution; and a repetition of such acts in the approaching election will be held as revolutionary, and resisted with all the means and power under our control.

Resolved, That the aim and object of the Democratic party is to preserve the Federal Union and the rights of the States unimpaired; and they hereby declare that they consider that the admistrative usurpation of extraordinary and dangerous powers not granted by the Constitution; the subversion of the civil by military law in States not in insurrection; the arbitrary military arrest, imprisonment, trial, and sentence of American citizens in States where civil law exists in full force; the suppression of freedom of speech and of the press; the denial of the right of asylum; the open and avowed disregard of State rights; the employment of unusual test oaths; and the interference with and denial of the right of the people to bear arms in their defence; are calculated to prevent a restoration of the Union and the perpetuation of a government deriving its just powers from the consent of the governed.

Resolved, That the shameful disregard of the admistraton to its duty in respect to our fellow-citizens who are now, and long have been, prisoners of war and in a suffering condition, deserves the severest reprobation, on the score alike of public policy and common humanity.

Resolved, That the sympathy of the Democratic party is heartily and earnestly extended to the soldiery of our army and the sailors of our navy, who are and have been in the field and on the sea, under the flag of our country; and, in the event of its attaining power, they will receive all the care, protection, and regard that the brave soldiers and sailors of the Republic have so nobly earned.

Events Have Controlled Me (1864)

In late March 1864, Lincoln met with several Kentucky leaders who were angry over the recruitment of Kentucky slaves by the Union Army. In seeking to harmonize their feelings, Lincoln discussed the evolution of his policy toward slavery from the beginning of the war to the present. In this subsequent letter to one of the participants, Lincoln summarized his remarks. Albert Hodges was the editor of a newspaper in Frankfort, Kentucky.

Executive Mansion,
Washington, April 4, 1864.

A. G. Hodges, Esq.
Frankfort, Ky.
My dear Sir:

You ask me to put in writing the substance of what I verbally said the other day, in your presence, to Governor Bramlette and Senator Dixon. It was about as follows:

"I am naturally anti-slavery. If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong. I can not remember when I did not so think, and feel. And yet I have never understood that the Presidency conferred upon me an unrestricted right to act officially upon this judgment and feeling. It was in the oath I took that I would, to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States. I could not take the office without taking the oath. Nor was it my view that I might take an oath to get power, and break the oath in using the power. I understood, too, that in ordinary civil administration this oath even forbade me to practically indulge my primary abstract judgment on the moral question of slavery. I had publicly declared this many times, and in many ways. And I aver that, to this day, I have done no official

FRANK ROY P. BASLER, et al., eds., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, vol. 7 (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953), pp. 281-82.

act in mere deference to my abstract judgment and feeling on slavery. I did understand however, that my oath to preserve the constitution to the best of my ability, imposed upon me the duty of preserving, by every indispensable means, that government—that nation—of which that constitution was the organic law. Was it possible to lose the nation, and yet preserve the constitution? By general law life and limb must be protected; yet often a limb must be amputated to save a life; but a life is never wisely given to save a limb. I felt that measures, otherwise unconstitutional, might become lawful, by becoming indispensable to the preservation of the constitution, through the preservation of the nation. Right or wrong, I assumed this ground, and now avow it. I could not feel that, to the best of my ability, I had even tried to preserve the constitution, if, to save slavery, or any minor matter, I should permit the wreck of government, country, and Constitution all together. When, early in the war, Gen. Fremont attempted military emancipation, I forbade it, because I did not then think it an indispensable necessity. When a little later, Gen. Cameron, then Secretary of War, suggested the arming of the blacks, I objected, because I did not yet think it an indispensable necessity. When, still later, Gen. Hunter attempted military emancipation, I again forbade it, because I did not yet think the indispensable necessity had come. When, in March, and May, and July 1862 I made earnest, and successive appeals to the border states



HORACE GREELEY

Our Bleeding Country Longs for Peace (1864)

Horace Greeley, the editor of the powerful New York Tribune, was a frequent thorn in Lincoln's side. An unreliable adviser, the mercurial editor oscillated between extreme and sometimes contradictory positions, and was subject to great mood swings that clouded his judgment and often produced self-doubt. Although a brilliant, slashing writer, he lacked the ability to sway people who were not already committed to his cause. Indeed, following the Union debacle at Bull Run in July 1861, Greeley privately advised Lincoln to abandon the war and recognize the Confederacy. Now in the summer of 1864 he took up the cause of peace negotiations. In the following letter, he urged Lincoln to begin discussions with Confederate leaders to end the war.

to favor compensated emancipation, I believed the indispensable necessity for military emancipation, and arming the blacks would come, unless averted by that measure. They declined the proposition; and I was, in my best judgment, driven to the alternative of either surrendering the Union, and with it, the Constitution, or of laying strong hand upon the colored element. I chose the latter. In choosing it, I hoped for greater gain than loss; but of this, I was not entirely confident. More than a year of trial now shows no loss by it in our foreign relations, none in our home popular sentiment, none in our white military force,—no loss by it any how or any where. On the contrary, it shows a gain of quite a hundred and thirty thousand soldiers, sea-men, and laborers. These are palpable facts, about which, as facts, there can be no cavilling. We have the men; and we could not have had them without the measure.

[“]And now let any Union man who complains of the measure, test himself by writing down in one line that he is for subduing the rebellion by force of

of God.
Yours truly

A. Lincoln

I add a word which was not in the verbal conversation. In telling this tale I attempt no comment to my own sagacity. I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me. Now, at the end of three years struggle the nation's condition is not what either party, or any man devised, or expected. God alone can claim it. Whether it is tending seems plain. If God now wills the removal of a great wrong, and wills also that we of the North as well as you of the South, shall pay fairly for our complicity in that wrong, impartial history will find therein new cause to attest and revere the justice and goodness of God.

truth.”]

and in the next, that he is for taking these hundred and thirty thousand men from the Union side, and placing them where they would be but for the measure he condemns. If he can not face his case so stated, it is only because he can not face the

Abraham Lincoln Outlines His Terms for Peace (1864)

insurgents which the impartial must pronounce frank and generous. If only with a view to the momentous Election soon to occur in North Carolina, and of the Draft to be enforced in the Free States, this should be done at once.

I would give the safe conduct required by the Rebel envoys at Niagara . . . but you may see reasons for declining it. But, whether through them or otherwise, do not, I entreat you, fail to make the Southern people comprehend that you and all of us are anxious for peace. . . .

Mr. President, I fear you do not realize how intensely the people desire any peace consistent with the national integrity and honor . . . With United States stocks worth but forty cents in gold per dollar, and drafting about to commence on the third million of Union soldiers, can this be wondered at?

I do not say that a just peace is now attainable, though I believe it to be so. But I do say, that a frank offer by you to the insurgents of terms . . . will . . . prove an immense and sorely needed advantage to the national cause; it may save us from a northern insurrection. . . .

I beg you to invite those now at Niagara to exhibit their credentials and submit their ultimatum.

Yours truly,

Horace Greeley

New York, July 7, 1864

My Dear Sir:

I venture to inclose you a letter and telegraphic dispatch that I received yesterday from our irrepresible friend, Colorado Jewett, at Niagara Falls. I think they deserve attention. Of course, I do not indorse Jewett's positive averment that his friends . . . have "full powers" from J.D. [Jefferson Davis], though I do not doubt that *he* thinks they have. I let that statement stand as simply evidencing the anxiety of the Confederates everywhere for peace. So much is beyond doubt.

And thereupon I venture to remind you that our bleeding, bankrupt, almost dying country also longs for peace—shudders at the prospect of fresh conscriptions, of further wholesale devastations, and of new rivers of human blood. And a widespread conviction that the Government . . . are not anxious for Peace, and do not improve proffered opportunities to achieve it, is doing great harm now, and is morally certain, unless removed, to do far greater in the approaching Elections. . . .

I entreat you, in your own time and manner, to submit overtures for pacification to the Southern

FROM Horace Greeley to Abraham Lincoln, July 7, 1864, Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

Lincoln came under very heavy pressure in the summer of 1864 to open peace negotiations with the Confederacy, but he realized that such negotiations were futile, since Jefferson Davis would never accept reunion. Hoping to unmask the Confederate government's true position, he sent a reluctant Horace Greeley, who was a persistent party critic, to meet with Confederate representatives in Canada. Lincoln knew that Greeley's trip constituted a wild goose chase, but he thought it might aid the Union cause, and in any case it would certainly embarrass the strident New

A Democratic Soldier Votes for Lincoln (1891)

With so many men away at war, a number of northern states made provisions for soldiers to vote in the fields in November 1864. Lincoln demonstrated a remarkable appeal to the men in the Union ranks, and indeed his powerful support from Union soldiers swelled his margin of victory. In the following account, a Union officer described the decision of one New Hampshire enlisted man, who was a lifelong Democrat, to vote for Lincoln, aided by some patriotic rhetoric from his captain.

On the morning of that [election] day, at roll-call, I told the men of my company that there would be no drill, and that at nine o'clock A.M. opportunity to vote would be given all of them who were legal voters in New Hampshire. The law made the three ranking officers in each company judges of election. Having no lieutenant, I invited two sergeants to assist me. My tent was about six feet by seven, and sink into the ground twelve or fifteen inches for greater security against bullets that might come straying around at any time. It was noticed, however, that on that day the rebels were unusually quiet, firing scarcely a shot. A cigar box answered for a ballot box. The state furnished blanks for recording each voter's name, together with that of the town he claimed to be his residence, and for whom he voted. In case, therefore, a man voted who had no right to do so, his vote could be thrown out. The polls having been declared open, and both Democratic and Republican votes placed upon the table, the men came up, were registered, voted, and retired.¹ There was one man, a good specimen of the New Hampshire voter who goes to town-meeting and makes a day of it. He seemed in no hurry to vote, and I invited

In this period, parties printed their own ballots.

FROM LYMAN JACKMAN, *History of the Sixth New Hampshire Regiment* (Concord, N.H.: Republican Press Association, 1891), pp. 344–46.

While the listened attentively:

"What! hoist the white flag when our triumph is nigh! What! crouch before treason—make freedom a lie! What! spike all our guns when the foe is at bay, With his flags and black banners fast dropping away!"

I added the response, "Not much!" and he, with-out saying a word, put the Lincoln ballot into the box, had his name recorded, and walked away.

Company F voted solid for Lincoln, of free choice and without undue influence. And it is gratifying

to record the fact that the soldiers' election was likewise a fair one throughout the army.



ABRAHAM LINCOLN

The Election Was a Necessity (1864)

Shortly after the election, a group of well-wishers came to the White House and ser- enaded the president. In response Lincoln read the following brief remarks on the significance of the election, which he had written out. Some advisers had suggested earlier that the election be cancelled or postponed, but Lincoln gave no consideration to such a policy. The United States was the first modern nation to hold a general election in wartime.

November 10, 1864

It has long been a grave question whether any gov- ernment, not too strong for the liberties of its peo- ple, can be strong enough to maintain its own existence, in great emergencies. On this point the present rebellion brought our republic to a severe test; and a presidential election occurring in regular course during the rebellion added not a little to the strain. If the loyal people, united, were put to the utmost of their strength by the rebellion, must they not fall when *divided*, and partially paralyzed, by a political war among them- selves?

But the election was a necessity.

We can not have free government without elec- tions; 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.

FROM ROY P. BASLER, et al., ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, vol. 8 (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univer- sity Press, 1953), pp. 100-101.

But the rebellion continues; and now that the

election is over, may not all, having a common

interest, re-unite in a common effort, to save

our common country? For my own part I have

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But the election, along with its incidental, and

undesirable strife, has done good too. It has dem- on-

strated that a people's government can sustain a

national election, in the midst of a great civil war.

Until now it has not been known to the world that

this was a possibility. It shows also how sound, and

how strong we still are. It shows that, even among

candidates of the same party, he who is most de-

voted to the Union, and most opposed to treason,

can receive most of the people's votes. It shows

also, to the extent yet known, that we have more

men now, than we had when the war began. Gold

is good in its place; but living, brave, patriotic men

are better than gold.

other man may be disappointed or pained by the result.
May I ask those who have not differed with me, to join with me, in this same spirit towards those who have?
And now, let me close by asking three hearty cheers for our brave soldiers and seamen and their gallant and skilful commanders.



CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Lincoln's Election Is a Mandate to Abolish Slavery (1864)

Following the 1864 election, the Chicago Tribune, a strongly antislavery Republican paper, insisted that Lincoln's re-election represented a popular mandate to abolish slavery.

The Voice of the People.

In any country no true statesman would fail in deciding upon the policy of the administration, to observe carefully the changes in public sentiment, and to mould his measures to suit the demands of the people. This course of action, the dictate of the soundest political sagacity under every government, is a supreme duty with us, who hold the will and choice of the people to be the source of all power, and to be diligently sought for, and faithfully and intently obeyed as pronounced. It is not always easy to ascertain what public sentiment is, and after an election involving many and various questions and issues, the most candid and fair minds may differ as to the meaning and extent of the popular decision. . . . It is often difficult to ascertain on what subject the popular opinion is united, and in regard to what question its decision is unanimous and determined. As re-

FROM *Chicago Tribune*, 18 November 1864.

gards the election just terminated, very few if any can be found who doubt that the people have voted with an overwhelming majority, that the rebellion must be subdued by force, that there shall be no compromise or armistice with rebels in arms, that the Union must be restored, and the authority of the Government re-established to its extreme bounds; of the will and determination of the people on all these issues there can be no doubt. There is another subject, that of slavery, which has been a controlling one in the canvass, as it always has and will be so long as it exists, and it is most important to know what judgment and purpose the people have expressed at the polls respecting it. If the platform of the party who have been so triumphantly sustained by the people, is to be taken as proof of the popular determination, then beyond a doubt the people demand the destruction of slavery, as the deadliest foe to the country, and the real life and support of the rebellion. The Administration would be false to its avowed purposes, as given in the platform, and to its solemn pledges to the country, and to the loyal