

## How Abraham Lincoln Defeated 'Vox Populi' and Saved the Nation

by Susan Welsh

From President Fujimori of Peru, to Prime Minister Mahathir of Malaysia, many world leaders today face the dilemma of how to ensure the continued survival of their nations, in the face of Jacobin insurgencies, terrorism, economic warfare, and military attack. The patriotic leader knows what is required to defend the national sovereignty; yet popular opinion, the *vox populi*, is frequently mobilized against him, and, under the banner of "democracy," a hostile press and foreign-sponsored political forces are fueling an insurrection that will, if not defeated, destroy the nation. Under such conditions, how can a democratic republic survive?

Political organizers in the LaRouche movement face a similar challenge: Surrounded by a morally decaying popular culture, a *vox populi* which demands the modern equivalent of the Roman Empire's "bread and circuses," they struggle to lift their fellow citizens out of that degraded state, to bring about a cultural, political, and economic renaissance. But the *vox populi* cries out: "I have the right to my own opinion!"

How can these sometimes-daunting challenges be overcome?

To find answers, there is no better, or more inspiring, model to study, than Abraham Lincoln.

Given the halo that now surrounds the memory of that martyred President, it is easy to lose sight of how very difficult his victory was, over those who sought to destroy the United States. Not only did more Americans die in the Civil War than in all other wars combined, before and since; but Lincoln himself was by no means a popular President during his lifetime. He was as continuously vilified by those who said he was going too fast or too far in his emancipation of the slaves, as by those who said he was not going fast or far enough. When, in early 1864, after nearly three years of war, he sought his party's nomination for a second term in office, there was not a single member of the U.S. Senate who supported him.

In his Gettysburg Address of Nov. 19, 1863, Lincoln underlined that the challenge now is "for us the living . . . to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. . . ."

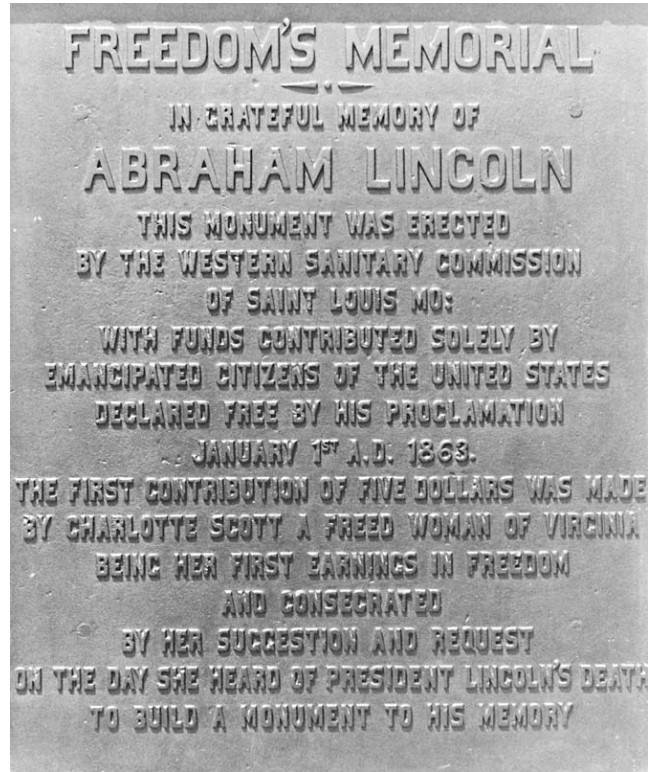
When these words were spoken, it was truly an open question, whether that "unfinished work" would be finished, or abandoned.

It is often said that the Battle of Gettysburg (July 1-3, 1863) was "the high-water mark of the Confederacy." This image gives the wrong impression: that after Gettysburg, the "flood waters" of war receded, more or less on their own, and that afterwards it was pretty much a foregone conclusion that the Union would win. Nothing could be further from the truth.<sup>1</sup> The Union victory at Gettysburg did provide a much-needed boost to Union morale, coming after the horrible defeats at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville; it also had strategic importance, in discouraging Great Britain from extending diplomatic recognition to the Confederate States of America. But Gen. Ulysses S. Grant's victory at Vicksburg on July 4 was of greater military significance, particularly in light of Gen. George Meade's failure to pursue and destroy Gen. Robert E. Lee's retreating Army of Virginia after Gettysburg, as Lincoln pleaded with him to do. And there were many battles still to be fought, with a terrible cost in human life, as Grant and Lee slugged it out, at places with grim names like "the Wilderness" and "Cold Harbor."

Indeed, there were many dark days after Gettysburg, as before it, when it looked as though the fighting spirit of the Union's people, and of its generals, would succumb to pessi-

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1. See Fletcher Pratt, *A Short History of the Civil War: Ordeal by Fire* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1997; first published by Harrison Smith and Robert Haas, Inc., 1935). This wonderfully written book is the best popular introduction to the history of the Civil War that I have seen.



The Emancipation Monument in Washington, D.C.'s Lincoln Park, also known as the Freedmen's Monument. The memorial was built on the initiative of freed slaves, and entirely with funds contributed by them, as the plaque describes. President Lincoln is holding the Emancipation Proclamation in his right hand. The man whose face was the model for the slave whose shackles are falling away, was the last slave to be returned to his master under the Fugitive Slave Law. The memorial was dedicated by Frederick Douglass on April 14, 1876, with President Grant and the entire Cabinet present (see p. 26 for excerpts from Douglass's famous oration).

mism and defeat. Without Lincoln's creative, inspired leadership, it is highly doubtful that the Union would have been restored and slavery abolished.

As the hideous casualties of the war mounted, the *vox populi* exploded in rage against the President. The Democrats clamored for a peace settlement with the Confederacy, which would either leave slavery intact in a reunited nation, or would leave the nation forever divided. When Lincoln announced his preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, he was pilloried in the press, and, the Republican Party lost heavily in the November 1862 mid-term elections, retaining control of Congress by only a narrow margin. When the President ordered the first military draft in American history, in July 1863, in order to secure the manpower required to win the war, riots broke out around the country. The most serious were in New York City, where over a hundred people were killed, and victims of the mob—particularly blacks—were beaten and lynched. Soldiers of the Army of the Potomac, who had just won the Battle of Gettysburg, had to be brought in to suppress the rioting. The press went wild against "Black Abraham," "the gorilla," "the abolitionist dictator," and the President received daily threats of assassination. Just to take one example, a Democratic newspaper in Wisconsin wrote in 1864: "If he is elected to misgovern for another four years, we trust some bold hand will pierce his heart with dagger point for the

public good."<sup>2</sup>

In the late summer of 1864, in the only U.S. Presidential election campaign ever held during a civil war, Lincoln was convinced that he could not gain reelection.

What turned the tide, was Lincoln's mobilization of the power of ideas. Not merely the spoken word, however—although today, all the world knows the power of Lincoln's words. Had it not been for the fulfillment of those ideas in military victories—and just in the nick of time—Lincoln probably would have lost the 1864 election, and Democrat George McClellan would have become President. McClellan's program was to conclude a peace settlement based on restoring the *status quo ante*: union with slavery. General William T. Sherman's capture of Atlanta on Sept. 3, 1864, followed by his brilliant March to the Sea, ripping out the guts of the Confederacy's plantation economy, and General Sheridan's successful campaign in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, revived the flagging confidence of the Northern electorate, that the war could indeed be won, and that all the death and destruction would not have been in vain. These military victories, achieved thanks to courage and intelligence on the part of many people in many individual battles, were only possible because of the strategic leadership of General-in-

2. *La Crosse Democrat*, Aug. 29, 1864.

Chief U.S. Grant, in close partnership with his President. Neither man could have done it without the other, and Lincoln's role in helping to shape the military strategy of the Union side was indispensable.

What were the secrets to Lincoln's strength of character, which allowed him to prevail, when others wavered?

First, was his unswerving commitment to reason, to truth. It often took him long and intense thought and observation to figure out what the truth was—which some people falsely took to be vacillation or procrastination—but once he had made up his mind, he could not be deterred. As he expressed it on one occasion, "My mind is like a piece of steel—very hard to scratch anything on it, and almost impossible after you get it there to rub it out."<sup>3</sup>

This, combined with a sense of political timing in how to implement the dictates of reason, *with the consent of the governed*. Believing, as he fervently did, in the founding principles of the Declaration of Independence, that "all men are created equal," and also that ours must be a government "of the people, by the people, for the people," he waited—for what some abolitionists thought was an unconscionably long time—before issuing his Emancipation Proclamation, for example. Yet, had he attempted to free the slaves earlier, many a Union officer would have resigned his commission; the border slave states would have joined the Confederacy; and the cause would have been lost.

The great African-American leader and former slave Frederick Douglass keenly recognized this paradox: "Viewed from the genuine abolition ground, Mr. Lincoln seemed tardy, cold, dull, and indifferent; but measuring him by the sentiment of his country, a sentiment he was bound as a statesman to consult, he was swift, zealous, radical, and determined."

Finally, there was Lincoln's willingness to assume personal responsibility for the course of history. While many Washington politicians expected that they would be able to manipulate and control the new President, they soon learned that this hope was groundless. He made up his own mind. Lincoln's longtime law partner, William Herndon, reports that when people would ask him whether he had not written one or another speech for Lincoln, he would respond: "You don't understand Mr. Lincoln. No man ever asked less aid than he; his confidence in his own ability to meet the requirements of every hour was so marked that his friends never thought of tendering their aid, and therefore no one could share his responsibilities. . . . He often asked as to the use of a word or the turn of a sentence, but if I volunteered to recommend or even suggest a change of language which involved a change of sentiment I found him the most inflexible man I have ever seen."<sup>4</sup>

When Lincoln arrived in Washington, Secretary of State

3. Joshua Speed, quoted in William H. Herndon and Jesse W. Weik, *Herndon's Life of Lincoln*, (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1983 republication of 1942 edition), p. 421.

4. Herndon, op. cit., p. 387.

William Seward thought he would be able to control the upstart prairie President, functioning as a kind of prime minister. When Herndon mentioned rumors to this effect to Lincoln, the latter replied: "I may not rule myself, but certainly Seward shall not. The only ruler I have is my conscience—following God in it—and these men will have to learn that yet."<sup>5</sup> And learn it, they did.

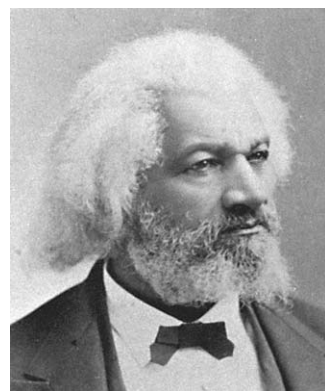
Many psycho-biographers have dwelt on Lincoln's "melancholy," the deep depressions that assaulted him periodically throughout his life. Some have even portrayed him, ludicrously, as a kind of Hamlet figure, vacillating, looking for approval from others before deciding what to do.<sup>6</sup> Such accounts fail to explain how such a depressed man could have risen to such heights of leadership, inspiration—and humor!

5. *Ibid.*, p. 414.

6. For example, Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None: The Life of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1978), sometimes falls into this view.

## Frederick Douglass's Oration on Lincoln

*The African-American leader Frederick Douglass (who described Lincoln as "the first great man that I talked with in the United States freely, who in no single instance reminded me of the difference between himself and myself, of the difference of color") spoke at the unveiling of the Freedmen's Monument of Abraham Lincoln, in Lincoln Park, Washington, D.C., on April 14, 1876. Here are a few excerpts from his famous oration.*



. . . It must be admitted, truth compels me to admit, even here in the presence of the monument we have erected to his memory, Abraham Lincoln was not, in the fullest sense of the word, either our man or our model. In his interests, in his associations, in his habits of thought, and in his prejudices, he was a white man. . . . You [whites] are the children of Abraham Lincoln. We are at best only his stepchildren; children by adoption, children by forces of circumstances and necessity. . . .

I think the seeming paradox can only be understood, by viewing Lincoln in his continuing struggle to live up to the great mission that he knew God and history had designated for him. There were times that the tasks seemed overwhelming. But he would summon up his innermost emotional and intellectual resources, tell a funny and politically devastating story, or recite a relevant passage from Shakespeare—frequently achieve a creative breakthrough that would transform the political or military geometry. His secretary John Hay later commented that “his intellectual arrogance and unconscious assumption of superiority” made him hated by the “patent-leather, kid-glove set who know no more of him than an owl does of a comet blazing into his blinking eyes.”<sup>7</sup> (That could also be said of the latest crop of Lincoln’s modern-day detractors.)

In this report, we examine a few of the most important

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7. Herndon, *op. cit.*, p. 416.

examples of Lincoln’s battle against *vox populi*: his hand-to-hand combat with Illinois Democrat Stephen Douglas, over the extension of slavery and Douglas’s concept of “popular sovereignty”; his emancipation of the slaves; and his role in the military-strategic conduct of the war.

### Early Development of Creative Leadership

Lincoln’s law partner Herndon, in his *Life of Lincoln*, provides many rich insights into the mind of the future President.<sup>8</sup> Lincoln’s conduct as a lawyer was characterized by the

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8. Unlike many modern biographers, Herndon’s main preoccupation is precisely with Lincoln’s *mind*—not his melancholy or his marital problems, although Herndon’s passages on the latter subjects seem to be what most historians remember from his book. Herndon, although one of historians’ principal sources on Lincoln’s character, is widely reviled. For example, Richard Marius, editor of *The Columbia Book of Civil War Poetry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), waspishly describes him as “Lincoln’s former law partner, who made a career out of turning Lincoln’s life into legend once Lincoln was safely dead and could not contradict him.” One might note

The name of Abraham Lincoln was near and dear to our hearts in the darkest and most perilous hours of the Republic. We were no more ashamed of him when shrouded in clouds of darkness, of doubt, and defeat than when we saw him crowned with victory, honor, and glory. Our faith in him was often taxed and strained to the uttermost, but it never failed. . . . Despite the mist and haze that surrounded him; despite the tumult, the hurry, and confusion of the hour, we were able to take a comprehensive view of Abraham Lincoln, and to make reasonable allowance for the circumstances of his position. We saw him, measured him, and estimated him; not by stray utterances to injudicious and tedious delegations, who often tried his patience; not by isolated facts torn from their connection; not by any partial and imperfect glimpses, caught at inopportune moments; but by a broad survey, in the light of the stern logic of great events, and in view of the divinity which shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will, we came to the conclusion that the hour and the man of our redemption had somehow met in the person of Abraham Lincoln. . . .

His great mission was to accomplish two things: first, to save his country from dismemberment and ruin; and, second, to free his country from the great crime of slavery. To do one or the other, or both, he must have the earnest sympathy and the powerful cooperation of his loyal fellow-countrymen. Without this primary and essential condition to success his efforts must have been vain and utterly fruitless. Had he put the abolition of slavery before the salvation of the Union, he would have inevitably driven from him a powerful class of the American people and rendered resistance to rebellion impossible. Viewed from the genu-

ine abolition ground, Mr. Lincoln seemed tardy, cold, dull, and indifferent; but measuring him by the sentiment of his country, a sentiment he was bound as a statesman to consult, he was swift, zealous, radical, and determined. . . .

Few great public men have ever been the victims of fiercer denunciation than Abraham Lincoln was during his administration. He was often wounded in the house of his friends. Reproaches came thick and fast upon him from within and without, and from opposite quarters. He was assailed by Abolitionists; he was assailed by slaveholders; he was assailed by the men who were for peace at any price; he was assailed by those who were for a more vigorous prosecution of the war; he was assailed for not making the war an abolition war; and he was bitterly assailed for making the war an abolition war. . . .

[Lincoln’s assassination] was a new crime, a pure act of malice. No purpose of the rebellion was to be served by it. It was the simple gratification of a hell-black spirit of revenge. But it has done good after all. It has filled the country with a deeper abhorrence of slavery and a greater love for the great liberator. . . .

Dying as he did die, by the red hand of violence, killed, assassinated, taken off without warning, not because of personal hate—for no man who knew Abraham Lincoln could hate him—but because of his fidelity to union and liberty, he is doubly dear to us, and his memory will be precious forever. . . .

*Reprinted in Waldo W. Braden, ed., Building the Myth: Speeches Memorializing Abraham Lincoln (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), and in Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass.*

creative spark which would develop throughout the rest of his life. He was most successful, when he would come up with some totally unexpected tactical move that would throw the opposing lawyer into confusion. Usually, this was through humor, which he used as a powerful weapon to win over the jury. (Such as the time he took the wind out of the eloquence of an opposing attorney, Stephen Logan, by warning the jury not to be overcome by the man's rhetoric, since, "shrewd and careful though he be, still he is sometimes wrong. Since this trial has begun I have discovered that, with all his caution and fastidiousness, he hasn't knowledge enough to put his shirt on right." As Herndon notes, Logan had his shirt on backwards. "The general laugh which followed destroyed the effect of Logan's eloquence over the jury—the very point at which Lincoln aimed.")<sup>9</sup>

But humor was not the only means at his disposal for achieving victory. When roused to anger at the injustice of a particular case, he would go for the jugular. This characteristic, which would recur many times throughout Lincoln's life, is sharply at variance with mythologies about the mild-mannered, easily manipulated, even "clownish" President. (See box on Wright case.)

Herndon relates that Lincoln was both a brilliant, and a terrible, lawyer, depending upon the situation. A self-taught man, Lincoln hardly ever read law books, and argued his cases more on the basis of reason and justice, than from legal precedent. He proceeded slowly in his preparation of a case, seeking to sweep aside all extraneous detail and pierce through to the core idea of the case as a whole. But he could only be effective, if he believed in the justice of the case. Writes Herndon: "With him justice and truth were paramount. If to him a thing seemed untrue he could not in his nature simulate truth. His retention by a man to defend a lawsuit did not prevent him from throwing it up in its most critical stage if he believed he was espousing an unjust cause."<sup>10</sup>

A lawyer friend from Illinois who knew Lincoln well, Leonard Swett, wrote that "he never made a sophistical argument in his life, and never could make one. I think he was of less real aid in trying a thoroughly bad case than any man I was ever associated with. If he could not grasp the whole case and believe in it, he was never inclined to touch it."<sup>11</sup>

He was utterly unmethodical (his lifetime habit was to stuff notes to himself under his hat). He never paid attention to formalisms and rules, a trait which his legal adversaries particularly feared. According to Herndon, he "very often resorted to some strange and strategic performance which invariably broke his opponent down or exercised some pecu-

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that Herndon, too, is safely dead, and so cannot contradict Marius. Herndon had his flaws; prime among them was his failure to understand Lincoln's Whig economic policy of "internal improvements." But as an observer of Lincoln's character, Herndon was thorough, brilliant, and, overall, fair.

9. Herndon, op. cit., p. 288.

10. Ibid., p. 262.

11. Ibid., p. 431.

liar influence over the jury. Hence the other side in a case were in constant fear of one of his dramatic strokes, or trembled lest he should 'ring in' some ingeniously planned interruption not on the programme."<sup>12</sup>

This was the quality of creative flanking maneuver that he would later bring to bear in more important contests, as President of the United States.

## The Battle against 'Popular Sovereignty'

Lincoln's early political career, in the Illinois legislature and then in Congress, was devoted mainly to the Whig Party's program of internal improvements: the development of canals, railroads, and other infrastructure.<sup>13</sup> Believing, as he did, that all men are created equal, in the image of God, he also believed in the constitutional mandate for government to promote the general welfare, to the end that all men might develop their full potentiality, and that their children might have a more productive and fulfilling life. While Lincoln did not emphasize the issue of slavery early in his career, he had always abhorred it, and his Whig economic program and his moral opposition to slavery were two aspects of one coherent conception of man. (This was not true of all Whigs, and the party eventually dissolved in ineffectiveness. In turn, the Republican Party which replaced it did not uniformly support the Whig economic program, and Lincoln and his economic advisers, such as Henry Carey, had to combat a powerful free-trade faction.) During his early career, Lincoln hoped and believed that slavery would gradually disappear on its own, as the economy advanced. Lincoln and his co-thinkers wanted to industrialize the South as well as the North, and they expected that the slave-based plantation system would not survive such an economic transformation.

But this calculation did not take into account the strength of the oligarchical mind-set which was determined to keep the South a feudal, backward society. Further, the depletion of the land by the slave-based cotton monoculture, impelled the system to extend its reach. The hope of a gradual end to slavery was shattered by the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854, which permitted the extension of slavery into the western territories (areas which were not yet states). This obliterated Henry Clay's Missouri Compromise of 1820, which had excluded slavery from the northern section of the old Louisiana Purchase territory—the states north of Arkansas.

The man most responsible for the Kansas-Nebraska Act

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12. Ibid., p. 287-88.

13. See W. Allen Salisbury, *The Civil War and the American System: America's Battle with Britain, 1860-1876* (Washington, D.C.: EIR, 1992, reprint of 1978 edition); Anton Chaitkin, *Treason in America: From Aaron Burr to Averell Harriman* (Washington: Executive Intelligence Review, 1999), and articles by Chaitkin, including: "Leibniz, Gauss Shaped America's Science Successes," *EIR*, Feb. 9, 1996; "The 'Land-Bridge': Henry Carey's Global Development Program" and "Henry Carey and Abraham Lincoln," *EIR*, May 2, 1997; and "The Lincoln Revolution," *Fidelio*, Spring 1998. See also G.S. Boritt, *Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream* (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1978).

## The Wright Case: Going for the Jugular

William Herndon, Lincoln's law partner and biographer, relates a story which demonstrates Lincoln's "killer instinct" as a lawyer, when a matter of basic human decency was involved. This was a suit brought by Lincoln and Herndon, to compel a pension agent to refund a portion of a fee which he had withheld from the widow of a soldier in the Revolutionary War. The woman was old and crippled; her entire pension was \$400, of which the agent, whose name was Wright, had retained half. Lincoln demanded that Wright return the money, but when the man refused, the case went to trial.

Herndon hunted up for Lincoln, at the latter's request, a history of the war. Lincoln advised his partner to remain during the trial, to hear his address to the jury. "For," said he, "I am going to skin Wright, and get that money back."

The only witness Lincoln introduced was the old lady. In his speech to the jury, Herndon reports, "Lincoln recounted the causes leading to the outbreak of the Revolutionary struggle, and then drew a vivid picture of the hardships of Valley Forge, describing with minuteness the men, barefooted and with bleeding feet, creeping over the ice. As he reached that point in his speech wherein he narrated the hardened action of the defendant in fleeing

the old woman of her pension his eyes flashed, and throwing aside his handkerchief, which he held in his right hand, he fairly launched into him." Lincoln depicted the deceased soldier, parting with his wife at the threshold of their home, kissing their little babe in the cradle, as he started for the war. "The heroes of '76 have passed away and are encamped on the other shore," he concluded. "The soldier has gone to rest, and now, crippled, blind, and broken, his widow comes to you and to me, gentlemen of the jury, to right her wrongs. She was not always thus. She was once a beautiful young woman. Her step was elastic, her face fair, and her voice as sweet as any that rang in the mountains of old Virginia. But now she is poor and defenseless. Out here on the prairies of Illinois, many hundreds of miles away from the scenes of her childhood, she appeals to us, who enjoy the privileges achieved for us by the patriots of the Revolution, for our sympathetic aid and manly protection. All I ask is, shall we befriend her?"

Herndon reports that the jury, half of them in tears, "returned a verdict in our favor for every cent we demanded." Lincoln refused payment for his services.

Lincoln's notes for the argument were unique in the history of the legal profession: "No contract. — Not professional services. — Unreasonable charge. — Money retained by Def't not given by Pl'ff. — Revolutionary War. — Describe Valley Forge privations. — Ice. — Soldier's bleeding feet. — Pl'ff's husband. — Soldier leaving home for army. — *Skin Def't*. — Close."

was the Democratic Senator Stephen Douglas, Lincoln's fellow lawyer from Illinois. Seeking to advance his own Presidential ambitions by a scheme that, he claimed, would end the increasingly bitter controversy over slavery, Douglas argued for "popular sovereignty": that "the people" (the white male voters, only, of course) of the frontier territories should themselves decide, at some unspecified time, whether to uphold or abolish slavery in their territory. The result of this bill was that civil war became inevitable, as Southerners sought to extend slavery into the territories, Douglas's Democrats insisted that this was their right, and Northern "anti-Nebraska" men mobilized to prevent it. The conflict was further intensified in 1857, with the U.S. Supreme Court's infamous *Dred Scott* decision, which ruled that a slaveowner could cross state lines, into a free state, in order to reclaim his "property." Chief Justice Roger Taney wrote in his opinion on the case, that the Declaration of Independence did not apply to the Negroes, who "had no rights that the white man was bound to respect."

Lincoln now realized that slavery was *not* going to die out, but in fact would spread into the North. First in Illinois, and then nationally, he became a leading spokesman against popular sovereignty, through his debates with Douglas during

the summer of 1854, and again in 1858, when Lincoln unsuccessfully sought the U.S. Senate seat held by Douglas. What popular sovereignty (or "squatter sovereignty") really means, Lincoln said, is that, "if one man chooses to enslave another, no third man had the right to object."<sup>14</sup>

In June 1858, the Illinois Republican Party held a convention which nominated Lincoln to run for senator against Douglas. But the contest was not only for the senatorial seat; the time for a Presidential election was approaching, and Lincoln was becoming viewed as a possible contender, principally against William Seward, who held sway over most of the Republican Party in the North.

It was at this convention that Lincoln delivered one of the most famous speeches of his life, the "House Divided" speech, in which he ripped to shreds Douglas's "popular sovereignty." Lincoln began:

If we could first know *where* we are, and *whither* we are tending, we could then better judge *what* to do, and *how* to do it.

14. The "House Divided" speech, June 16, 1858, Abraham Lincoln, *Collected Works*, Vol. II, pp. 461-462.

We are now far into the *fifth* year, since a policy was initiated [the Kansas-Nebraska Act], with the *avowed* object, and *confident* promise, of putting an end to slavery agitation.

Under the operation of that policy, that agitation has not only, *not ceased*, but has *constantly augmented*.

In *my* opinion, it *will* not cease, until a *crisis* shall have been reached, and passed.

“A house divided against itself cannot stand.”

I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half *slave* and half *free*.

I do not expect the Union to be *dissolved*—I do not expect the house to *fall*—but I *do* expect it will cease to be divided. It will become *all* one thing, or *all* the other.

Either the *opponents* of slavery, will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction; or its *advocates* will push it forward, till it shall become alike lawful in *all* the States, *old* as well as *new*—*North* as well as *South*. . . .<sup>15</sup>

After having written the final draft of this explosive speech, Lincoln locked the office door, drew the curtain across the glass panel, and read the document to his partner, Herndon. Herndon, an ardent abolitionist himself, responded, with reference to the biblical metaphor of the “house divided”: “It is true, but is it wise or politic to say so?” Like many other Republican leaders in the state, Herndon was afraid of losing votes, by taking an “extreme” position. Lincoln replied: “That expression is a truth of all human experience. . . . I want to use some universally known figure expressed in simple language as universally well-known, that may strike home to the minds of men in order to raise them up to the peril of the times. I do not believe I would be right in changing or omitting it. I would rather be defeated with this expression in the speech, than be victorious without it.”<sup>16</sup>

A little later, before delivering the speech in Springfield, Lincoln read it to a dozen or so political friends. One denounced it as a “d—d fool utterance”; another said it was “ahead of its time.” No one endorsed it, except Herndon, who said, “Lincoln, deliver that speech as read and it will make you President.” Having listened to all the others’ opinions, Lincoln rose from his chair and said: “Friends, this thing has been retarded long enough. The time has come when these sentiments should be uttered; and if it is decreed that I should go down because of this speech, then let me go down linked to the truth—let me die in the advocacy of what is just and right.”<sup>17</sup>

The next day, the speech was delivered. Herndon believed

that it “drove the nail into Seward’s political coffin,” making possible Lincoln’s nomination as the Republican Presidential candidate a year and a half later.

But after the speech, the *vox populi* rose in a chorus of denunciations—from both Democrats and Republicans. To one complainant, Lincoln said, “If I had to draw a pen across my record, and erase my whole life from sight, and I had one poor gift or choice left as to what I should save from the wreck, I should choose that speech and leave it to the world unerasable.”<sup>18</sup>

Then, he took to the stump, for the famous series of debates with Senator Douglas. The debates took place in seven towns around the state, and tens of thousands of people turned out to listen to them, in hot weather and cold, in the open air. These were all-day affairs, with the three-hour afternoon debates preceded by parades and other festivities in the morning, and by speeches from other political figures in the evening. Truly, this was before the age of the 60-second televised campaign “sound bite” that passes for political debate today. The whole community participated, thrashing out the vital issues of freedom, sovereignty, the purpose of government, and the reasons for—or against—the continued existence of the nation.

The debates centered around the issues posed in Lincoln’s “House Divided” speech. They are too long to summarize here, but one excerpt from a speech in Alton, Illinois, may serve to convey the power of Lincoln’s argument. The real issue, he stressed, is *slavery*—not states’ rights or “popular sovereignty.” “There are two principles that have stood face to face from the beginning of time, and will ever continue to struggle,” he said. “The one is the common right of humanity, and the other is the divine right of kings. It is the same principle, in whatever shape it develops itself. It is the same spirit that says, ‘You work and toil and earn bread, and I eat it.’”<sup>19</sup>

In those days, senators were chosen by the state legislature, not by popular vote. Although Lincoln’s Republicans won more of the popular vote than Douglas’s Democrats did, Lincoln lost the election, due to the Democratic holdovers from the previous election who remained in the legislature. Commenting on the loss, he pointed out the paradox that Douglas had been supported, “both as the best means to break down and to uphold the slave interest. No ingenuity can keep these antagonistic elements in harmony long. Another explosion will come.”<sup>20</sup>

And come it did. When Lincoln and Douglas next faced each other, in the 1860 Presidential race, Southern Democrats abandoned the equivocating Douglas for John Breckenridge, the current Vice President, splitting the Democratic vote, and Lincoln was elected the 16th President of the United States

15. Ibid.

16. Herndon, op. cit., p. 325.

17. Ibid., p. 326.

18. Ibid., p. 327.

19. Ibid., p. 334.

20. Ibid., p. 338.

on Nov. 6. On Dec. 20, South Carolina seceded from the Union; and on April 12, 1861, the Confederates fired on Fort Sumter. The Civil War had begun.

## The Emancipation Proclamation

When the war started, Americans on both sides had no idea that four years of carnage lay ahead of them, a war which would claim the lives of 620,000 soldiers. Each side expected the other to give in, after a few glorious battles. The first call-up of Union troops was only for 90 days. Some professional military officers on the Union side suspected that this was not going to be so simple (“the South will fight,” said Grant). But even they expected an early victory.

Then came the first Battle of Bull Run, July 21, 1861. Washington’s high society took a jaunt out to Manassas, with their families, picnic baskets, and opera glasses, to watch the fun, and instead saw the ill-prepared Union volunteer regiments in a rout. Gen. George McClellan, age 34, was brought in to head up the Union armies; but, like a 19th-century Baby Boomer, the “Young Napoleon” wouldn’t fight. He always convinced himself (wrongly) that he was outnumbered by tremendous odds, whined to Lincoln for (non-existent) reinforcements, and avoided battle if at all possible. The Union generals were constantly at one another’s throats. When there *was* a battle, it was usually a defeat. The political situation in the border slave states that had remained in the Union was highly unstable, as Confederate sympathizers constituted a sizable fifth column, and the

loyalty of many people remained uncertain.

The *vox populi* and the media blamed the President. To take one example, from a little later in the war (1863), the Republican Senator John Sherman wrote to his brother, Gen. William T. Sherman: “How fervently I wish Lincoln was out of the way — any body would do better. I was among the first of his political friends to acknowledge how fearfully we were mistaken in him. He has not a single quality befitting his place. I could name a thousand evidences of this. . . . He is unstable as water — afraid of a child & yet sometimes stubborn as a mule. I shall never cease to regret the part I took in his election and am willing to pay a heavy penance for this sin. This error I fear will be a fatal one as he is unfit to control events and it is fearful to think what may come during his time.”<sup>21</sup>

This background sets the stage for one of the great acts of the drama of the Civil War: the Emancipation Proclamation.

Since the first day of the war, the abolitionists had been demanding that Lincoln immediately free the slaves. He agreed with their moral position, yet he believed that emancipation under these conditions would be extremely dangerous. The population and the Army of the Union states were deeply divided over the issue of slavery. Military commanders in the West, such as Grant, were trying to win and keep the loyalty of slaveholders in the border states, and in captured Confederate

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21. Letter dated May 7, 1863, cited in Stanley P. Hirshson, *The White Tecumseh: A Biography of William T. Sherman* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1997), p. 149.

## Lincoln: Independence for All Nations

*U.S. Rep. James Garfield gave a speech on Feb. 12, 1878, to a Joint Session of Congress, at the formal presentation to the Congress of Francis B. Carpenter’s painting “The First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation of President Lincoln.” This interesting speech includes the following quote from Lincoln, showing how he saw the U.S. Declaration of Independence as a banner for all mankind, not only Americans. Lincoln said these words in Carpenter’s Hall in Philadelphia on Feb. 22, 1861, en route to Washington to assume the office of the President. He was under threat of assassination at that time, such that a portion of his journey had to be made incognito.*

I have never had a feeling, politically, that did not spring from the sentiments embodied in the Declaration of Independence. I have often pondered over the dangers which

were incurred by the men who assembled here and framed that Declaration. I have pondered over the toils that were endured by the officers and soldiers of the army who achieved that independence. I have often inquired of myself what great principle or idea it was that kept this confederacy so long together. It was not the mere matter of the separation of the colonies from the mother land, but that sentiment in the Declaration of Independence, which gave liberty, not alone to the people of this country, but, I hope, to the world, for all future time. It was that which gave promise that, in due time, the weight would be lifted from the shoulders of all men. This is the sentiment embodied in the Declaration of Independence. Now, my friends, can this country be saved on that basis? If it can, I shall consider myself one of the happiest men in the world if I can help to save it. But if this country cannot be saved without giving up that principle, I was about to say, *I would rather be assassinated on this spot than surrender it.*

*Reprinted in Waldo W. Braden, ed., Building the Myth: Speeches Memorializing Abraham Lincoln (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990).*





*President Lincoln informs his Cabinet on July 22, 1862 that he will soon issue the Emancipation Proclamation. Engraving by A.H. Richie, from the painting by Francis B. Carpenter.*

territory. Then, there was the constitutional question. By what authority could any or all of the three branches of the Federal government emancipate slaves in the individual states?

Yet, if the abomination of slavery were allowed to persist, and the nation were somehow reunited on that basis, what would prevent a new war from breaking out, for exactly the same reasons that this one had?

Lincoln believed that emancipation would come, and should come, and he knew that he would have to be the man to bring it about. Only the President, in time of war, had the constitutional authority to seize the property of the enemy, he decided. But the question was, when and how could this be done in such a way that it would *advance*, not *destroy*, the cause of a Union victory. So, resisting the pressures from the abolitionists in his own party, he waited until he thought the time was right.

Then, on July 22, 1862, Lincoln informed his Cabinet that the decision was made, that he would proclaim: "*Be it ordered that, on the first day of January in the year of Our Lord, 1863, all persons held as slaves within any state or designated part of a state, the people whereof shall be in rebellion against the United States shall be then, thenceforward and forever free.*"

Lincoln said he would listen to the views of his Cabinet members as to the date upon which this proclamation would be issued; but the decision was made, and there would be no reversing it. At the urging of Secretary of State Seward, he agreed to wait for a Union victory on the battlefield, lest the emancipation be perceived as a desperation move by a Union on the verge of defeat. When General McClellan's forces, on Sept. 17, managed to force a Confederate retreat at the Battle

of Antietam, in the bloodiest battle in the war so far, Lincoln decided that that was enough of a victory for the political purpose at hand; five days later, he announced to the public what came to be known as the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation.

Why did he move then, and not at some other time? Frankly, the situation *was* desperate. It was necessary to make an audacious move, a flanking attack on the enemy, rather than staggering from one demoralizing defeat to the next. Lincoln knew that Antietam was not a real victory. McClellan's failure to pursue and destroy the enemy, who was within his grasp, convinced the President that the general would never act effectively. He fired McClellan on Nov. 5, 1862, noting that he was tired of "sticking sharp sticks under McClellan's ribs."

After the announcement of the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, there were still three months before it would take effect. It only applied to slavery in the states "in rebellion against the United States," and Lincoln hoped that the still-loyal slave states would see the handwriting on the wall, and agree to his offer of gradual and compensated emancipation of their slaves. They did not.

The crisis continued.

Democrats in the Midwestern states denounced the Proclamation as "monstrous" and "criminal," turning the war to save the Union into a "nigger war."<sup>22</sup> Newspapers raved about how freed slaves were going to come swarming into the cities of the North to fornicate with white women. Britain's Lord Palmerston dismissed the Proclamation as "trash." The Lon-

22. Oates, *op. cit.*, p. 350.

FIGURE 1  
**The Civil War, 1861-65**



don *Times* fulminated that the American President had appealed “to the black blood of the African; he will whisper of the pleasures of spoil and of the gratification of yet fiercer instincts; and when the blood begins to flow and shrieks come piercing through the darkness, Mr. Lincoln will wait till the rising flames tell that all is consummated, and then he will rub his hands and think that revenge is sweet.” British liberal leader William Gladstone chortled at the prospect that what had been the United States of America would remain forever divided: “Jefferson Davis and the other leaders of the South have made an army; they are making, it appears, a navy; and they have made what is more than either—they have made a nation. . . . We may anticipate with certainty the success of the Southern States so far as their separation from the North.”<sup>23</sup>

In the mid-term fall 1862 elections, Lincoln’s party was smashed. The North’s five most populous states—New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois—all of which had

gone for Lincoln in 1860, now voted Democratic majorities into Congress. New York and New Jersey chose Democratic governors, and the Midwest voted in heavily Democratic legislatures. In Lincoln’s home state of Illinois, anti-war Democrats now controlled the legislature.

As winter began, the military situation could hardly have been worse. McClellan was replaced, as commander of the Army of the Potomac, by Gen. Ambrose Burnside, who pleaded with Lincoln that he was not fit for the job; he was right. In mid-December, he led his troops in a frontal assault against Lee’s entrenched forces in Fredericksburg, Virginia, suffering one of the worst defeats in the war. In the West, Grant’s Army of Tennessee was stalled north of Vicksburg, Mississippi, the seemingly impregnable Confederate-controlled city that formed a strategic chokepoint on the Mississippi River. If Grant could capture Vicksburg, the Confederacy would be cut in two; but everything he had tried so far had failed, and loud voices were denouncing him as a drunkard and calling for his dismissal.

Clearly, another bold step was required, and Lincoln took it. His final text of the Emancipation Proclamation, issued on Jan. 1, 1863, included an important change over the earlier

23. Mark E. Neely, Jr., *The Last Best Hope of Earth: Abraham Lincoln and the Promise of America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 114.

FIGURE 2

## Key Battles in Virginia



version: He announced that henceforth blacks would be accepted into the Union Army. Lincoln argued this on grounds of military necessity, as well as morality. Rather than capitulate to the *vox populi*, he took the moral high ground—and a great gamble. This move was supported on the basis of military necessity (filling the depleted ranks of the Union Army, while depriving the Confederate Army of the slave labor that fed it, clothed it, and dug the trenches from which it fought); but it had a larger implication: Once you have accepted a man as a comrade-in-arms, and asked him even to die for his country, how then can you deny him the full privileges of citizenship, including the right to vote? This question would be fought out later (indeed, it is still being fought out today), but, unfortunately, Abraham Lincoln would no longer be alive to participate in its positive resolution.

General Grant and the abolitionists enthusiastically supported the military service of black Americans, but there was also strong opposition to it. General Sherman, for one, was unenthusiastic—both because of his racist views, and because of the practical problems facing the military, in dealing with the vast influx toward Union lines of runaway slaves—men, women, children, and the elderly. The problem of how these people were to be fed, sheltered, and clothed, while the Army concentrated on defeating the Confederates, was not a small one.

The irascible Sherman, despite his famous dictum, “*Vox populi, vox humbug!*,” was himself an expression of the popular opinion which Lincoln had to confront. Sherman’s attitude in the summer of 1864 is summed up in the following statement, in response to a law approved by Congress allowing each state to recruit Southern blacks and to deduct those from the state’s draft quota: “The duty of citizens to fight for their

country is too sacred a one to be peddled off by buying up the refuse of other states. . . . The negro is in a transition state, and is not the equal of the white man. . . . These are some of my peculiar notions, but I assure you they are shared by a large proportion of our fighting men.” In a letter to his wife on Aug. 6, while his army was bogged down outside Atlanta, he complained: “Agents are coming to me from Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Ohio to recruit Negroes as fast as they can catch them to count as soldiers. I remonstrated to Mr Lincoln in the strongest terms but he answered it was the Law and I had to submit. Niggers wont work now, and half my army are driving wagons, loading and unloading cars, and doing work which the very Negros we have captured might do, whilst these same niggers are soldiers on paper, but I can’t get any—The fact is modern Philanthropy will convert our oldest & best soldiers into laborers whilst the nigger parades & remains in some remote & safe place. It is an insult to our Race to count them as part of the quota.”

When some of his views found their way into print, Sherman lashed out, in another letter to his wife, “I like niggers well enough as niggers, but when fools & idiots try & make niggers better than ourselves I have an opinion.”<sup>24</sup>

Sherman was fighting for the Union; he was not fighting for freedom for the slaves. He shared his brother’s dislike of Lincoln, although his respect for the President apparently grew toward the end of the war, after they spent some time together, at war councils with Grant. Both Sherman brothers supported Lincoln in the 1864 Presidential election only reluctantly, because they preferred him to his Democratic opponent, McClellan, who they knew would never save the Union.

This is what Lincoln had to deal with.

He dealt with it in many ways, but we can give the reader a sense of his organizing method, by quoting a few excerpts from a letter he wrote to James C. Conkling on Aug. 26, 1863, to be read on his behalf, as a speech to an audience of “Unconditional Union” men in Springfield, Illinois. (He asked Conkling to “read it very slowly,” for maximum dramatic effect.) The speech reveals the complexity of the popular passions which Lincoln confronted, and his effort to steer his audience toward a higher moral plane.

. . . There are those who are dissatisfied with me. To such I would say: You desire peace; and you blame me that we do not have it. But how can we attain it? . . .

But to be plain, you are dissatisfied with me about the negro. Quite likely there is a difference of opinion between you and myself upon that subject.

I certainly wish that all men could be free, while I suppose you do not. Yet I have neither adopted nor proposed any measure which is not consistent with even your view, provided you are for the Union. . . .

You dislike the Emancipation Proclamation, and perhaps, would have it retracted. You say it is unconsti-

24. Hirshson, op. cit., p. 235.

tutional—I think differently. I think the constitution invests its Commander-in-chief with the law of war in time of war. The most that can be said, if so much, is that slaves are property. Is there—has there ever been—any question that by the law of war, property, both of enemies and friends, may be taken when needed? . . .

I know as fully as one can know the opinion of

others[,] that some of the commanders of our armies in the field who have given us our most important successes believe the emancipation policy and the use of colored troops constituted the heaviest blow yet dealt to the Rebellion, and that at least one of these important successes could not have been achieved when it was but for the aid of black soldiers. . . .

## The Colored Soldiers

by Paul Laurence Dunbar

If the muse were mine to tempt it  
 And my feeble voice were strong,  
 If my tongue were trained to measures,  
 I would sing a stirring song.  
 I would sing a song heroic  
 Of those noble sons of Ham,  
 Of the gallant colored soldiers  
 Who fought for Uncle Sam!

In the early days you scorned them,  
 And with many a flip and flout  
 Said “These battles are the white man’s,  
 And the whites will fight them out.”  
 Up the hills you fought and faltered,  
 In the vales you strove and bled,  
 While your ears still hear the thunder  
 of the foes’ advancing tread.

Then distress fell on the nation,  
 And the flag was drooping low;  
 Should the dust pollute your banner?  
 No! the nation shouted, No!  
 So when War, in savage triumph,  
 Spread abroad his funeral pall—  
 Then you called the colored soldiers  
 And they answered to your call.

And like hounds unleashed and eager  
 For the life blood of the prey,  
 Sprang they forth and bore them  
 bravely  
 In the thickest of the fray.  
 And where’er the fight was hottest,  
 Where the bullets fastest fell,  
 There they pressed unblanched and  
 fearless  
 At the very mouth of hell.

Ah, they rallied to the standard  
 To uphold it by their might:  
 None were stronger in the labors,  
 None were braver in the fight.  
 From the blazing breach of Wagner  
 To the plains of Olustee,  
 They were foremost in the fight  
 Of the battles of the free.

And at Pillow! God have mercy  
 On the deeds committed there,  
 And the souls of those poor victims  
 Sent to Thee without a prayer.  
 Let the fulness of Thy pity  
 O’er the hot wrought spirits sway  
 Of the gallant colored soldiers  
 Who fell fighting on that day!

Yes, the Blacks enjoy their freedom,  
 And they won it dearly, too;  
 For the life blood of their thousands  
 Did the southern fields bedew.  
 In the darkness of their bondage,  
 In the depths of slavery’s night,  
 Their muskets flashed the dawning,  
 And they fought their way to light.

They were comrades then and brothers,  
 Are they more or less to-day?  
 They were good to stop a bullet  
 And to front the fearful fray.  
 They were citizens and soldiers,  
 When rebellion raised its head;  
 And the traits that made them  
 worthy,—  
 Ah! those virtues are not dead.

They have shared your nightly vigils,  
 They have shared your daily toil;  
 And their blood with yours  
 commingling  
 Has enriched the Southern soil.  
 They have slept and marched and  
 suffered



*After the Emancipation Proclamation, 180,000 black soldiers served in the Union army.*

’Neath the same dark skies as you,  
 They have met as fierce a foeman,  
 And have been as brave and true.

And their deeds shall find a record  
 In the registry of Fame;  
 For their blood has cleansed  
 completely  
 Every blot of Slavery’s shame.  
 So all honor and all glory  
 To those noble sons of Ham—  
 The gallant colored soldiers  
 Who fought for Uncle Sam!

**Editor’s note:** *Paul Laurence Dunbar (1871-1906) is probably the greatest African-American poet to date. He was the son of former slaves, and his father, Joshua Dunbar, who had escaped to Canada before the war, later enlisted in the 55th Massachusetts Infantry.*

TABLE 1

**Casualties in American Wars**

War	Total Population	Number Serving	Number Serving as % of Population	Battle Deaths	Other Deaths
Civil War (Union only)	20,268,500	2,213,363	11%	140,414	224,097
World War I	92,228,496 (1910 census)	4,734,991	5%	53,402	63,114
World War II	132,164,569 (1940 census)	16,112,566	12%	291,557	113,842
Vietnam War	203,302,031 (1970 census)	8,744,000	4%	47,378	10,799

*These tables are intended to give a rough comparison of the impact of the Civil War on the Union population, by comparison with other wars in which the United States fought. They are drawn from various sources, which often give varying figures. In each war, casualties are counted differently. (For example, if a soldier is wounded, and dies of his wound months later, is that to be counted as a "battle death"?) For the Civil War, figures are given here only for the Union side, first, because our purpose is to illustrate the effect of the war on the vox populi in the Union, and second, because authoritative statistics for the Confederacy do not exist. It should be noted that the Union had more than twice the population of the Confederacy, and 40% of the latter was in slavery.*

You say you will not fight to free negroes. Some of them seem willing to fight for you; but no matter.

Fight you, then, exclusively to save the Union. I issued the proclamation on purpose to aid you in saving the Union. Whenever you have conquered all resistance to the Union, if I shall urge you to continue fighting, it will be an apt time then for you to declare you will not fight to free negroes.

I thought that in your struggle for the Union, to whatever extent the negroes should cease helping the enemy, to that extent it weakened the enemy in his resistance to you. Do you think differently? . . .

But negroes, like other people, act upon motives. Why should they do anything for us, if we will do nothing for them? If they stake their lives for us, they must be prompted by the strongest motive — even the promise of freedom. And the promise being made, must be kept. . . .

Peace does not appear so distant as it did. I hope it will come soon and come to stay, and so come as to be worth the keeping in all future time. It will then have been proved that, among free men, there can be no successful appeal from the ballot to the bullet; and that they who take such appeal are sure to lose their case and pay the cost. And then there will be some black men who can remember that, with silent tongue, and clenched teeth, and steady eye, and well-poised bayonet, they have helped mankind on to this great consummation; while I fear there will be some white ones, unable to forget that, with malignant heart and deceitful speech, they have strove to hinder it.

Still, let us not be over-sanguine of a speedy final triumph. Let us be quite sober. Let us diligently apply the means, never doubting that a just God, in his own good time, will give us the rightful result.<sup>25</sup>

Those modern-day detractors who say Lincoln was a racist, who only freed the slaves for narrow, military reasons, should ponder these words. And also, Lincoln's comment to his friend Joshua F. Speed, who initially opposed the Emancipation Proclamation. In a letter to Herndon after the President's death, Speed reports that, after the Proclamation was issued, he had a conversation with Lincoln in which the latter "alluded to an incident in his life, long passed, when he was so much depressed that he almost contemplated suicide. At the time of his deep depression he said to me that he had 'done nothing to make any human being remember that he had lived,' and that to connect his name with the events transpiring in his day and generation, and so impress himself upon them as to link his name with something that would redound to the interest of his fellow man, was what he desired to live for. He reminded me of that conversation, and said with earnest emphasis, 'I believe that in this measure [meaning his Proclamation] my fondest hope will be realized.' Over twenty years had passed between the two conversations."<sup>26</sup>

## Dark Days

When Lincoln said the hopeful words quoted above, that peace did not appear so distant as it once had, it was a little more than a month after the Union victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg. But those victories did not win the war; the Confederate armies were still strong, their morale was high, and the war would grind on for another 20 months.

**Table 1** summarizes the toll of casualties from the major battles of the Civil War. It allows us to calculate that, during the 49 months of the Civil War, an average of 12,653 American soldiers (Union and Confederate) died per month, and an average of 7,439 Union soldiers died per month. (This approximation does not take into account the fact that casualties at the beginning of the Civil War were much lighter than they became later.) Comparing those statistics to the Vietnam

25. Herndon, op. cit., pp. 444-448.

26. Ibid. pp. 422-423.

TABLE 1  
*continued*

Total Military Deaths	Military Deaths as % of Those Serving	Wounded, Not Mortal	Total Military Dead and Wounded	Military Dead and Wounded as % of Those Serving	Military Deaths as % of Total Population
364,511	16.5%	281,881	646,392	29.0%	1.80%
116,516	2.5%	204,002	320,518	6.8%	0.11%
405,399	2.5%	671,846	1,077,245	6.7%	0.31%
58,177	0.7%	153,303	211,480	2.4%	0.03%

TABLE 2  
**Impact of War on American Households**

War	Number of Households	One Military Death per Given Number of Households	Military Deaths as % of Population	Military Deaths as % of Est. Male Population
Civil War (Union only)*	3,838,731	10.53	1.80%	3.60%
World War I**	23,123,200	198.46	0.11%	0.23%
World War II (1940 census)	34,949,000	86.21	0.31%	0.61%
Vietnam War (1968)	60,813,000	1,045.31	0.03%	0.06%

\*Estimates, working from the 1860 census figures for the United States as a whole. We make the assumption, which may or may not be warranted, that the size of Union households reflected the national average.

\*\*Estimated from 1910 and 1920 censuses.

TABLE 3  
**Casualties of Selected Nations in World War I**

Nation	Number Serving	Total Deaths of Soldiers	Wounded, Not Mortal
Austria-Hungary	7,800,000	1,200,000	3,620,000
British Empire	8,904,467	908,371	2,090,212
France	8,410,000	1,357,800	4,266,000
Germany	11,000,000	1,773,700	4,216,058
Italy	5,615,000	650,000	947,000
Russia	12,000,000	1,700,000	4,950,000
United States	4,734,991	116,516	204,002

War (58,177 American deaths), we can see that in about four and a half months of the Civil War, more American soldiers died than during the entire Vietnam War; and in eight months of the Civil War, more Union soldiers died than during the entire Vietnam War. Keep in mind that during the Civil War, prior to the discovery of the germ theory of disease, two soldiers died of disease and infection, for every one who died in combat. (In Vietnam, there were 3,262 non-battlefield deaths; in the Civil War, there were 224,097 on the Union side alone. In Vietnam, 1 wounded man out of 200 died of his wounds; in the Civil War, 1 out of 4.) In the Civil War, as **Table 2** shows, a soldier died in every 10.53 households; in Vietnam, it was one death per 1,045.31 households.

TABLE 4  
**Casualties of Selected Nations in World War II**

Nation	Peak Strength	Battle Deaths
China	5,000,000	2,200,000*
France	5,000,000	210,671
Germany	10,200,000	3,500,000
Italy	3,750,000	77,494
Japan	6,095,000	1,219,000
United Kingdom	5,120,000	244,723
United States	12,300,000	292,131
U.S.S.R.	12,500,000	7,500,000**

\*Casualties beginning with the Japanese invasion in 1937.

\*\*Estimated total loss of U.S.S.R. population, both military and civilian: 20,000,000.

With this grim death toll in mind, we proceed to a quick chronology of relevant military and political events:

In March 1864, Lincoln brings General Grant to the East, naming him General-in-Chief of all the Union armies, with the rank of lieutenant-general: the highest rank in the Army, which had previously been held on a permanent basis only by George Washington, and as a brevet, or nominal rank, by Winfield Scott. Making his headquarters with General Meade's Army of the Potomac, Grant begins to coordinate the combined operations of all the armies, while waging a campaign against Robert E. Lee in Virginia that didn't

stop until the surrender at Appomatox over a year later.

The Union suffers defeats or inconclusive engagements in Virginia, north of Richmond, beginning in the spring, as Grant growls that he will “fight it out on this line if it takes all summer”: the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor (see **Figure 2**, p. 34). Then, a dramatic shift in strategy, as Grant sweeps south of Lee’s forces, crosses the James River south of Richmond, in one of the most daring maneuvers of the war. Overnight, he empties the trenches under the eyes of Lee’s pickets and moves 115,000 men up to 50 miles in three days, crossing two rivers deep in enemy territory, and building a pontoon bridge more than 2,000 feet long across the James River—the largest ever built—virtually under the guns of the enemy.<sup>27</sup> In June begins the nine-month siege of Petersburg, a railroad hub vital to supplying Richmond and Lee’s army.

The body count rises week by week, as families are left without a breadwinner, and in some towns of the North, not a single young man returns from war alive.

The rancorous debate continues throughout the land over the Emancipation Proclamation, the future of the freed slaves, and reconstruction policy toward the conquered portions of the Confederacy. The President is under heavy pressure to repeal the Proclamation. The Republican Party reluctantly nominates him in June, as its Presidential candidate for the elections in November, but during the summer, an open revolt grows against his candidacy. A rump group of Republicans calls for a new convention, to choose another nominee. Sen. Charles Sumner, a leader of the abolitionist faction of the party, urges Lincoln to resign.

On Aug. 23, Lincoln, anticipating that the Democrats would soon choose George McClellan as their candidate, writes a secret memorandum, surely one of the most remarkable paragraphs ever written by an American President: “This morning, as for some days past, it 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.” He signs the note, folds and seals it, and has each of his Cabinet members sign it, without telling them what it says. Then, he puts it away.

Also in August, Lincoln discusses with Frederick Douglass his concern, that the freed slaves are not joining up with the Union armies “so rapidly and so numerously” as he had hoped; Douglass points out that most slaves don’t know that they have been “emancipated.” It is not the sort of thing that their masters are inclined to tell them about. Lincoln proposes a daring and highly dangerous project: He asks Douglass to organize a band of black “scouts” to spread the word through the plantations of the South. Fearful of losing the Presidential election, Lincoln wants to get as many

27. Geoffrey Perret, *Ulysses S. Grant: Soldier and President* (New York: Random House, 1997).

slaves to freedom as possible, before the Democrats get into power.<sup>28</sup>

But before the plan is implemented, Atlanta falls to Sherman’s army on Sept. 2, Sheridan defeats Gen. Jubal Early in the Shenandoah on Oct. 19, the slave-based plantation system is smashed, hopes of peace and victory are rekindled, the *vox populi* rallies in support of Lincoln’s war policy, and the “scout” project is rendered unnecessary. On Election Day, Lincoln defeats McClellan by a larger majority of the popular vote (nearly half a million votes) than had ever been received by any President up to that time.

## Military-Political Leadership

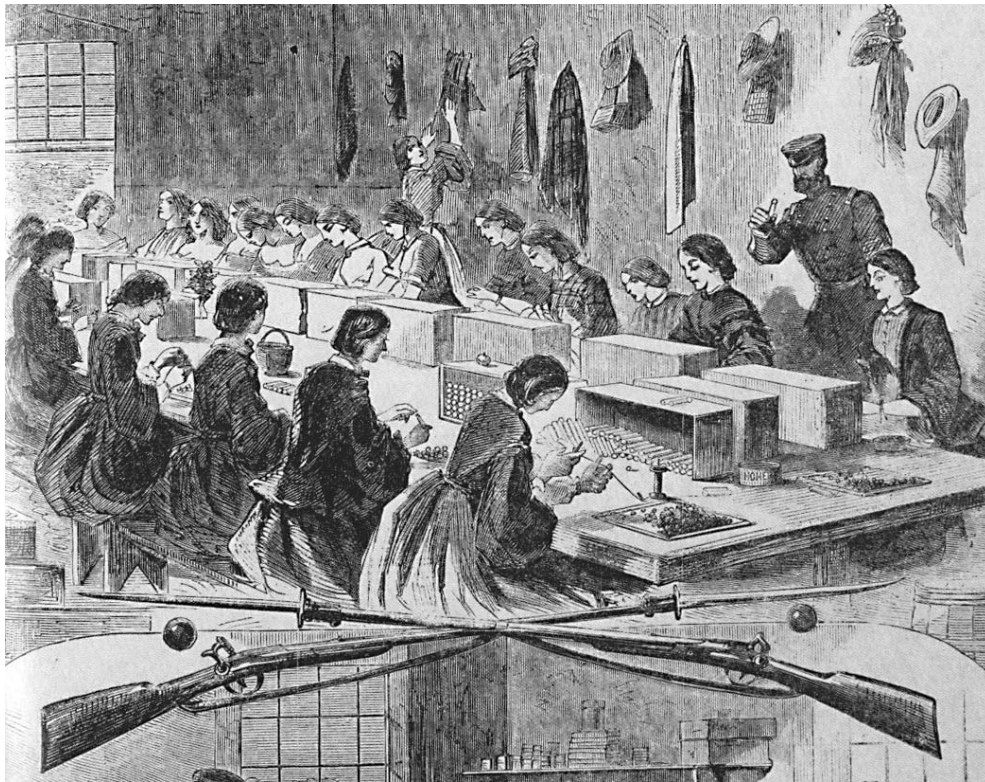
The military history that led to the Union victories in Atlanta, the Shenandoah, and the other victories in the months to come, is beyond the scope of this article. But a few observations will show how Lincoln exerted leadership in the combined military-political domain, making it possible to retain the morale of the armed forces, and the loyal spirit of sufficient numbers of the population, without which the war could not have been won.

In many articles in *EIR*, Lyndon LaRouche has discussed the military theory of the flank, to illustrate the mind-set that is required for republican statecraft in a broader sense. In a recent example,<sup>29</sup> LaRouche analyzed the strategic conceptions of the great nineteenth-century European military figures Lazare Carnot and Gerhard Scharnhorst, and then compared them to the leaders of America’s Civil War: “So, Carnot and Scharnhorst, Grant, Sherman, and Sheridan typify commanders, like President Lincoln, and like MacArthur later, who were first of all statesmen, rather than merely soldiers, whose policy is not the mere scores piled up in winning of battles, but early successful conclusion of war, that in an historically decisive, timely fashion. The object of warfare is winning the peace, ultimately the peace that brings to a close the need to continue to practice war on this planet, and nothing else, a peace which could never be achieved without first establishing global hegemony for a community of sovereign, republican nation-state republics.”

The Union victory was not exclusively, or even primarily, the result of military innovations, or superiority in firepower and manpower. The war was won by the flanking moves of the political-military command, under Lincoln’s strategic leadership. The Emancipation Proclamation was an example of a political flanking move, which had profound military-strategic consequences. Grant, for one, hailed it as “the heaviest blow yet given the Confederacy.” It gave the war a moral purpose which it lacked otherwise—even though not all soldiers and their families were willing to accept that right away.

28. Neely, op. cit., p. 121.

29. Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., “On the Subject of Missile-Defense: When Andropov Played Hamlet,” *EIR*, April 21, 2000. See also, Andreas Ranke, “Schlieffen, Carnot, and the Theory of the Flank,” *EIR*, Feb. 6, 1998.



*In this sketch by Winslow Homer, women make cartridges for the Union army in a government arsenal in New York. The work was highly dangerous: A mistake could lead to the deaths of the factory workers, or of the soldier firing the gun.*

Lincoln, having no generals competent in grand strategy at the beginning of the war, had to become his own strategist. He approached it the same way he learned to practice law: by a crash course of self-instruction. He made errors, but he also learned quickly. Historian T. Harry Williams argues convincingly that Lincoln was “a great natural strategist, a better one than any of his generals. He was in actuality as well as in title the commander in chief who, by his larger strategy, did more than Grant or any other general to win the war for the Union.”<sup>30</sup> Unlike George McClellan and the other generals who commanded large forces prior to Grant’s appointment as General-in-Chief—and also unlike Robert E. Lee—Lincoln saw the “big picture” from the start.

Where did the Union’s real strategic strength lie? Firepower, mobility, and larger population are often cited, but the essence of the matter goes deeper, to the cultural and economic factors that distinguished the Union from the Confederacy. Lincoln, and those who responded to his leadership, were motivated by belief in the idea upon which the United States was founded: an image of man, in which each person develops his or her own God-given creative powers, in which society’s development fosters the increase of productivity, lightening the burdens of labor, and in which the purpose of government is to promote the general welfare. From this conception—antithetically opposed to the oligarchical slave

system—flows the economic superiority of the North. Under Lincoln’s leadership, as against the “free-trade” system of the South, the United States emerged from the Civil War the most powerful economic power on Earth.<sup>31</sup>

From this standpoint, Lincoln’s strategic conceptions matured. He immediately adopted a modification of the aging Gen. Winfield Scott’s “Anaconda Plan,” strangling the Confederacy with a naval blockade. He grasped the importance of seizing control of the Mississippi River, so that the Confederacy would not be able to sustain itself economically. Later in the war, Sherman’s March to the Sea and Sheridan’s rampage through the Shenandoah Valley were hammer-blows of economic warfare which made it impossible for the South to continue to fight.

Lincoln, unlike all the generals of the first years of the war, saw that the military objective had to be the destruction of the Confederate armies, *not* the occupation of Southern territory or the conquest of the Confederate capital, Richmond. If Richmond fell, but the armies remained intact, the war would continue. He could not fathom why McClellan failed to pursue Lee after the victory at Antietam, and why Meade did the same after Gettysburg. Both were satisfied to see the enemy withdraw from the battlefield intact, ready to fight another day. Lincoln was not. He pressed the others on.<sup>32</sup>

The day after the fighting stopped at Gettysburg, Meade

30. T. Harry Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1952), p. vii.

31. Works by Salisbury and Chaitkin, op. cit.

32. Williams, op. cit., p. 7.



## Lincoln on Grant

*Lincoln was the master of the use of a particular kind of metaphor, to communicate ideas: jokes and stories. Here is one example, in which he dealt with the repeated demands for the ouster of Gen. U.S. Grant.*

Out in my State of Illinois there was a man nominated for sheriff of the county. He was a good man for the office, brave, determined and honest, but not much of an orator. In fact, he couldn't talk at all; he couldn't make a speech to save his life.

His friends knew he was a man who would preserve the peace of the county and perform the duties devolving upon him all right, but the people of the county didn't know it. They wanted him to come out boldly on the platform at political meetings and state his convictions and principles;

they had been used to speeches from candidates, and were somewhat suspicious of a man who was afraid to open his mouth.

At last the candidate consented to make a speech, and his friends were delighted. The candidate was on hand, and, when he was called upon, advanced to the front and faced the crowd. There was a glitter in his eye that wasn't pleasing, and the way he walked out to the front of the stand showed that he knew just what he wanted to say.

"Feller Citizens," was his beginning, the words spoken quietly, "I'm not a speakin' man; I ain't no orator, an' I never stood up before a lot of people in my life before; I'm not goin' to make no speech, 'xcept to say that I can lick any man in the crowd!"

*Reprinted in the delightful collection by P.M. Zall (ed.), Abe Lincoln Laughing: Humorous Anecdotes from Original Sources by and about Abraham Lincoln (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1997).*

congratulated his men for forcing Lee out of Pennsylvania, saying that now we have to "drive from our soil every vestige of the presence of the invader." When Lincoln received the telegram containing that message, he fully expected the news that Meade had smashed Lee's army before it could escape across the Potomac. But instead, his hands dropped to his knees and in an anguished tone he said, "Drive the invader from our soil! My God! Is that all?"<sup>33</sup> For Lincoln, though not for Meade, "our soil" was the *entire* United States of America—north and south.

On Sept. 19, 1863, Lincoln wrote a letter to Gen. Henry Halleck (the bureaucrat who served reluctantly as General-in-Chief prior to Grant's appointment to that post) vigorously opposing Meade's post-Gettysburg plan to proceed against Richmond:

To avoid misunderstanding, let me say that to attempt to fight the enemy slowly back into his intrenchments at Richmond, and then to capture him, is an idea I have been trying to repudiate for quite a year.

My judgment is so clear against it that I would scarcely allow the attempt to be made if the general in command should desire to make it. My last attempt upon Richmond was to get McClellan, when he was nearer there than the enemy was, to run in ahead of him. [McClellan didn't do it—SW.] Since then I have constantly desired the Army of the Potomac to make Lee's army and not Richmond, its objective point. If our army cannot fall upon the enemy and hurt him where he

is, it is plain to me it can gain nothing by attempting to follow him over a succession of intrenched lines into a fortified city.<sup>34</sup>

Even Grant did not understand this crucial point at first. He had fought exclusively in the West, and had no experience with commanding the war effort as a whole. In January 1864, most of the forces west of the Mississippi were put under his command, and Halleck—who anticipated that Grant would soon be put in charge of *all* the armies—wrote to convey to him the President's strategic thinking, and to ask for Grant's views on strategy for all theaters of the war. Grant wrote a memorandum which basically presented Richmond as the primary objective—undoubtedly to Lincoln's dismay. But Grant, unlike his predecessors, learned quickly from his mistakes. He discarded this perspective readily, after he was named General-in-Chief (in March), and had an opportunity to meet and talk with Lincoln.<sup>35</sup>

The keenness of Lincoln's military-political understanding was also shown in his understanding of what was required to win a war in those days, in human terms. After the disastrous Battle of Fredericksburg in December 1862, in which General Burnside launched a frontal assault against a fortified city and suffered more than 12,000 casualties, the President spoke to one of his secretaries, William O. Stoddard, who recalled the conversation later:

We lost fifty per cent more men than did the enemy, and

33. Oates, op. cit., p. 269.

34. Williams, op. cit., p. 287.

35. Ibid., p. 296

yet there is sense in the awful arithmetic propounded by Mr. Lincoln. He says that if the same battle were to be fought over again, every day, through a week of days, with the same relative results, the army under Lee would be wiped out to its last man, the Army of the Potomac would still be a mighty host, the war would be over, the Confederacy gone, and peace would be won at a smaller cost of life than it will be if the week of lost battles must be dragged out through yet another year of camps and marches, and of deaths in hospitals rather than upon the field. No general yet found can face the arithmetic, but the end of the war will be at hand when he shall be discovered.<sup>36</sup>

Ulysses S. Grant was that general. Not only could he “face the arithmetic,” but he was, in many ways, “on the same wavelength” as his Commander-in-Chief, more so than any other general. He fully understood the political urgency of military victories, in view of the virtual certainty that Lincoln would not be returned to office without them. Therefore, he pressed on against Lee, with what Lincoln called his “bulldog grip,” even while the newspapers, the *vox populi*, screamed that Grant was a “butcher,” insensitive to loss of human life. On the other hand, he understood the crucial military importance of political breakthroughs. When Lincoln won re-election, Grant telegraphed his jubilant congratulations, calling it “a victory worth more to the country than a battle won.” Like Lincoln, Grant had that indispensable quality of *Entschlossenheit*: the recognition that “the buck stops here,” and the confidence that victory *would* be won, under his leadership. Or, as Sherman said of Grant, “I am a better soldier than he, but I lack his iron nerve. I would have retreated on the first day at Shiloh.”

Finally, Lincoln’s statesmanship encompassed the idea of a policy to *win the peace*. He always looked ahead to the day on which the United States would be one nation again, and gave much thought to the reconstruction of the South—economic as well as political—and how the freed slaves might be educated and given the skills to become productive members of society. His beautiful Second Inaugural Address of March 4, 1865, is the highest expression of this view. Both sides of the conflict, he said, “read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any man should dare to ask a just God’s assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men’s faces; but let us judge not that we be not judged.” Noting the enormous cost of the war, Lincoln nevertheless expressed his readiness to continue it, if necessary, concluding:

Fondly do we hope—ferently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by

36. Neely, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

## Lincoln and the British

*Shortly before his death, Lincoln told this story about the British Empire:*

John Bull met with a North American Indian, and in the course of conversation was very anxious to impress him with the greatness of the British Empire. “The sun,” said Mr. Bull, “never sets on English dominion. Do you understand how that is?” “Oh, yes,” said the Indian, “that is because God is afraid to trust them in the dark.”

*Reprinted in P.M. Zall (ed.), Abe Lincoln Laughing (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1997).*

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, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said “the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether.”

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.

Lincoln was fully conscious of what this speech represented, as a challenge to the *vox populi*. He would comment afterwards that it would “wear as well as—perhaps better than—any thing I have produced.” But, he noted, “I believe it is not immediately popular. Men are not flattered by being shown that there has been a difference of purpose between the Almighty and them. To deny it, however, in this case, is to deny that there is a God governing the world. It is a truth which I thought needed to be told; and as whatever of humiliation there is in it, falls most directly on myself, I thought others might afford for me to tell it.”<sup>37</sup>

The power of this peace-winning policy can be seen in the fact that, after Lincoln’s assassination, he was mourned, not only throughout the North (including by those who had previously scorned him), but also in the defeated South. There was no patriot in the land, who did not rightly fear the consequences for the reunited nation, of the loss of this great leader.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 158.