

# LINCOLN LORE

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## LINCOLN LORE

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### LINCOLN'S PLAN FOR SAVING THE UNION

If one will read through, consecutively, without being interrupted, Lincoln's annual addresses to Congress, he will come from this experience more able to appreciate the emphasis which the president placed on what he called "compensated emancipation."

The special messages which Lincoln also prepared on this subject and the urgency with which he pushed their consideration to the front on every possible occasion, convinces one that this was Lincoln's preferred plan for saving the Union. Armed forces were from his viewpoint an unwelcome alternative.

He was especially desirous that the border states see the wisdom of compensated emancipation. He not only called a special conference with delegations representing these states on March 11, 1862, but directed an appeal to the representatives in Congress from the border states on July 12, of the same year.

The climax of his efforts in 1862 to bring the war to a close by the adopting of his plan occurred in the argument of his annual message nearly one-half of which was given over to a detailed discussion of the plan.

It is not the purpose of this monograph to review the brief he set forth, but to call attention to the insistence with which he urged its adoption. His attitude of mind rather than the genius of his plan is the object of our quest.

In the conclusion of his message after the plan for compensated emancipation had been presented we find him pleading for its adoption as follows:

"I do not forget the gravity which should characterize a paper addressed to the Congress of the nation by the Chief Magistrate of the nation. Nor do I forget that some of you are my seniors, nor that many of you have more experience than I in the conduct of public affairs. Yet I trust that in view of the great responsibility resting upon me, you will perceive no want of respect to yourselves in any undue earnestness I may seem to display.

"Is it doubted, then, that the plan I

propose, if adopted, would shorten the war, and thus lessen its expenditure of money and of blood? Is it doubted that it would restore the national authority and national prosperity, and perpetuate both indefinitely? Is it doubted that we here—Congress and Executive—can secure its adoption? Will not the good people respond to a united and earnest appeal from us? Can we, can they, by any other means so certainly or so speedily assure these vital objects? . . .

"Fellow citizens, we cannot escape history. We of this Congress and this administration will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance or insignificance can spare one or another of us. The fiery trial through which we pass will light us down, in honor or dishonor, to the latest generation. We say we are for the Union. The world knows we do know how to save it. We—even we here—hold the power and bear the responsibility. In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free—honorable alike in what we give and what we preserve. We shall nobly save or meanly lose the last, best hope of earth. Other means may succeed; this could not fail. The way is plain, peaceful, generous, just—a way which, if followed, the world will forever applaud, and God must forever bless."

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Although the Emancipation Proclamation had been operative and a discussion of the reaction towards it took up much space in the annual message of 1863, Lincoln could not close without making an appeal for his plan of compensated emancipation. He said, in part: "And while I do not repeat in detail what I have heretofore so earnestly urged on this subject my general views and feelings remain unchanged; and I trust that Congress will omit no fair opportunity of aiding these important steps to a great consummation."

One of the most pathetic incidents in Lincoln's administration occurred on February 5, 1865. It was Lincoln's final attempt to save the South from financial ruin by compensated emancipation. Although he did not live to direct the reconstruction he most surely would have included some such plan of economic relief for the South.

A part of his message prepared for Congress and submitted to his cabinet for approval follows:

"Fellow Citizens of the Senate and House of Representatives:

"I respectfully recommend that a joint resolution, substantially as follows, be adopted so soon as practicable by your honorable bodies:

"Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America, in Congress assembled, That the President of the United States is hereby empowered, in his discretion, to pay \$300,000,000 to the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia, in the manner and on the conditions following, to-wit: The payment to be made in six per cent. government bonds, and to be distributed among said states *pro rata* on their respective slave populations as shown by the census of 1860, and no part of said sum to be paid unless as resistance to the national authority shall be abandoned and cease, on or before the first day of April next; and upon such abandonment and ceasing of resistance one half of said sum to be paid in manner aforesaid, and the remaining half to be paid only upon the amendment of the National Constitution recently proposed by Congress becoming valid law, on or before the first day of July next, by the action thereon of the requisite number of States."

"The adoption of such resolution is sought with a view to embody it, with other propositions, in a proclamation looking to peace and reunion."

An endorsement in Lincoln's handwriting on the back of this message tells the story of his disappointment. "February 5, 1865. Today these papers, which explain themselves were drawn up and submitted to the cabinet and unanimously disapproved by them."

A. LINCOLN

The sequel to this meeting and to all of Lincoln's efforts for compensated emancipation is found in the notes of John G. Nicolay, his secretary, who says: "At this meeting of his Cabinet with the words 'You are all opposed to me,' sadly uttered, the President folded up the papers and ceased the discussion. The project was then nearest his heart and he doubtless meant to present it to the Cabinet again at a later day, hoping for its more favorable consideration."