

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN'S APPEAL FOR COMPENSATED EMANCIPATION

Seventy-five years ago to-day, on July 12, 1862, Abraham Lincoln addressed an appeal to Representatives of the Border States which reveals how earnestly and consistently he tried to bring hostilities to a close even at the very beginning of the war. This anniversary day should cause an appreciative reaction of the message which appears in part in this bulletin.

The question of greatest importance which Lincoln discussed in his annual message to Congress in December, 1861, may be introduced by this excerpt: "I recommend that Congress provide for accepting such persons (slaves) from such states, according to some mode of valuation, in lieu, pro tanto, of direct taxes or upon some other plan to be agreed on with such states respectfully: that such persons, on such acceptance by the General Government, be at once deemed free." Lincoln thought of this plan as Compensated Emancipation.

It is doubtful, if in all our American History there have been many questions before a state legislature more important in determining the general trend of national affairs in a great crisis than the bill advocating Compensated Emancipation introduced in the Delaware Legislature in special session at Dover in February, 1862. When it finally reached the Senate, composed of nine members, four voted "aye" and four voted "no" and one was silent or absent. Had the legislature of New Jersey paved the way for other states to concur in the President's plan, the whole procedure of civil strife would have been changed.

Disappointed over the New Jersey episode and also over the failure of Congress to make any provisions for gradual Emancipation, Lincoln addressed his famous message of July 12, 1862, to the members of Congress of the Border States. Some excerpts from it follow:

"Gentlemen: After the adjournment of Congress, now very near, I shall have no opportunity of seeing you for several months. Believing that you of the border States hold more power for good than any other equal number of members, I feel it a duty which I cannot justifiably waive to make this appeal to you. I intend no reproach or complaint when I assure you that, in my opinion, if you all had voted for the resolution in the gradual-emancipation message of last March, the war would now be substantially ended. And the plan therein proposed is yet one of the most potent and swift means of ending it. Let the States which are in rebellion see definitely and certainly that in no event will the States you represent ever join their proposed confederacy, and they cannot much longer maintain the contest. But you cannot divest them of their hope to ultimately have you with them so long as you show a determination to perpetuate the institution within your own States. Beat them at elections, as you have overwhelmingly done, and nothing daunted, they still claim you as their own. You and I know what the lever of their power is. Break that lever before their faces, and they can shake you no more forever. Most of you have treated me with kindness and consideration, and I trust you will not now think I improperly touch what is exclusively your own, when, for the sake of the whole country, I ask, Can you, for your States, do better than to take the course I urge? Discarding punctilio and maxims adapted to more manageable times, and looking only to the unprecedentedly stern facts of our case, can you do better in any possible event? You prefer that the constitutional relation of the States to the nation shall be practically restored without disturbance of the institution; and if this were done, my whole duty in this respect, under the Constitution and my oath of office, would be

performed. But it is not done, and we are trying to accomplish it by war. The incidents of the war cannot be avoided. If the war continues long, as it must if the object be not sooner attained, the institution in your States will be extinguished by mere friction and abrasion —by the mere incidents of the war. It will be gone, and you will have nothing valuable in lieu of it. Much of its value is gone already. How much better for you and for your people to take the step which at once shortens the war and secures substantial compensation for that which is sure to be wholly lost in any other event! How much better to thus save the money which else we sink forever in the war! How much better to do it while we can, lest the war ere long render us pecuniarily unable to do it! How much better for you as seller, and the nation as buyer, to sell out and buy out that without which the war could never have been, than to sink both the thing to be sold and the price of it in cutting one another's throats? I do not speak of emancipation at once, but of a decision at once to emancipate gradually

"I have again begged your attention to the message of March last. Before leaving the capital, consider and discuss it among yourselves. You are patriots and statesmen, and as such I pray you consider this proposition, and at the least commend it to the consideration of your States and people. As you would perpetuate popular government for the best people in the world, I beseech you that you do in no wise omit this. Our common country is in great peril, demanding the loftiest views and boldest action to bring it speedy relief. Once relieved, its form of government, is saved to the world, its beloved history and cherished memories are vindicated, and its happy future fully assured and rendered inconceivably grand. To you, more than to any others, the privilege is given to assure that happiness and swell that grandeur, and to link your own names therewith forever."

Two days after the foregoing appeal on July 14, 1862, Lincoln sent a special message to Congress in which he introduced this bill embodying his plan for compensating the various States for the loss of slaves by emancipation which likely would have terminated the war and brought economic relief to the South:

"Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America, in Congress assembled, That whenever the President of the United States shall be satisfied that any State shall have lawfully abolished slavery within and throughout such State, either immediately or gradually, it shall be the duty of the President, assisted by the Secretary of the Treasury, to prepare and deliver to such State an amount of six per cent interest-bearing bonds of the United States equal to the aggregate value, at _____ dollars per head, of all the slaves within such State as reported by the census of the year one thousand, eight hundred and sixty; the whole amount for any one State to be delivered at once if the abolishment be immediate, or in equal annual instalments if it be gradual, interest to begin running on each bond at the time of its delivery, and not before.

"And be it further enacted, That if any State, having so received any such bonds, shall at any time afterward by law reintroduce or tolerate slavery within its limits, contrary to the act of abolishment upon which such bonds shall have been received, said bonds so received by said State shall at once be null and void, in whosoever hands they may be, and such State shall refund to the United States all interest which may have been paid on such bonds."

NOTE—See Lincoln Lore No. 120 for further discussion of compensated Emancipation.