Chapter VI

THE COMMITMENT TO INEQUALITY: THE REPUBLICAN ATTITUDE TO BLACKS IN THE CIVIL WAR
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A study of the place of blacks in American society in the antebellum period cannot neglect the ideology of the Republican Party. The political and economic trends that led to the rapid growth of the Republican Party between 1854 and 1860, were reflected in the debates and contentions within the black community. Perceptive black leaders like Douglass and Garnet supported the Party which though anti-South, was by no means, antislavery.

The trends that are discernible in Lincoln's attitudes and perceptions will be the ones which we will focus on to arrive at an understanding of the period leading to the Civil War, and to the course of the war that led to the emancipation of the 4½ million blacks held as slaves. We will see that Lincoln and his contemporaries often responded to the events of the times rather than create them. In a sense this was inevitable; the magnitude of the changes and the complex impulses which guided them were beyond the control of a single agency or individual.

The antebellum decade represents a period in the United States over which American historians seem to be most undecided upon. The Civil War stands large as a period of discontinuity in the otherwise rapid growth of the Republic to the position of a preeminent power. From the early historians who chronicled the war as a "rebellion", through to the Beardian thesis of irrepressible conflict between diverse social and economic
systems, there seems to be an attempt to downplay the role of slavery among the causes of the conflict.

The great school of 'revisionist' historians led by James G. Randall, sought further to "objectify" the war by blaming it on blundering politicians on both sides. The most recent comprehensive study of the war by Allan Nevins, too views the war as a consequence of the inept leadership in the American political system in the 1850s as the primary cause for the actual outbreak of the war.

While many contemporary observers had viewed the war as a consequence of the slave system, post-Reconstruction historiography began to de-emphasize the importance of slavery as a cause of the outbreak of the most bloody war in American history. The factor of slavery as a cause of the Civil War began to gain emphasis again in the post-World War II period. Initially increasing attention was paid to the abolitionist movement. Then with the beginning of the upsurge of the black community in the 1950s, a renewed interest in slavery and its impact on the political, social and economic events of the times has led to a more balanced and deeper understanding of the Civil War period.

The recent work of scholars of black history and of slavery, has provided convincing evidence that a study of the

1 Thomas J. Pressly, Americans Interpret Their Civil War (New York, 1962), Chaps. 1, 4 and 5; see also Kenneth N. Stampp, ed., The Causes of the Civil War (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1961), Chaps. 1, 2 and 3.

2 Pressly, ibid., Chapter 7, pp. 354-60; Stampp, pp. 83-86.
beliefs, values, fears, prejudices and commitments of various sections of the American people help us to arrive at a broader understanding of the causes of the events in that period.

The Republican Movement

The 1850s were a decade of movement. The Mexican War brought huge expanses of territory for the United States. But, the territories acquired thus became the seed of an increasingly bitter sectional controversy that had in any case plagued the United States from its very inception. Beginning from the debates in Congress over the introduction of the Wilmot Proviso, a measure calling for the prohibition of slavery in the territories conquered from Mexico, to the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Western Territories were the focus of American politics in the 1850s. Intertwined in the motives which persuaded Senator Stephen A. Douglas to propose, in 1854, the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, were a genuine desire to organize the territories as political entities, his own commitments as a leader of the Democratic Party as well as the business interests of his own associates interested in land speculation and an

3 See the Preface of the second edition of John Hope Franklin's *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of the Negro Americans* (New Delhi, 1967); Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro and the Civil War* (Boston, 1954) and *Lincoln and the Negro* (New York, 1962); James M. McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Princeton, N.J., 1964); see also Edwin C. Koszarski, ed., *Slavery as a Cause of the Civil War* (Boston, 1949). In the 1940s, there were several other scholars like Herbert Aptheker, Philip J. Foner and others whose work we will cite or have already used who did pioneering work on the history of black Americans.
The debate over the political control of the Territories was, however, increasingly posed as a contest between two systems of labour—free and slave—projected by the new Republican Party. This Party, a product of the agitation against Senator Douglas' Kansas-Nebraska Act, arose as a purely sectional political alliance of Democrats, Whigs, Know-Nothings and other Northern and Western politicians. The almost spontaneous eruption of the feelings of the non-slave holding states against the Act presaged the end of the older political alignments in the nation. Now the sectional conflict was marked by the establishment of the Republican Party whose Presidential candidate John C. Fremont swept the North-east in the election of 1856 and made sizable dents in Democratic strongholds in the mid-West.

The thrust of the Republican Party as a sectional Northern Party, was against the slave South. Nevertheless, it did not necessarily imply a commitment to the extirpation of slavery in the land. In projecting the virtues of "free labor" upon which their region relied, they looked down upon slave-labour, but limited their attack on the South to calling for the restriction of slavery to the area delimited by the Missouri Compromise of 1820. Within the new Party, however, there was a wide spectrum of opinion, some individuals like Charles Sumner, John Andrew, George Julian, Owen Lovejoy, Joshua R. Giddings, Thaddeus Stevens,

and others were not averse to attacking the institution of slavery. However, mainstream Republican opinion was only that slavery should and ought to be restricted.

The ideological weapon used by the Republican leaders was the concept of "free labor". In a sense, this idea formed the response to the theme, evident in Southern thinkers since the 1830s, that slavery was a "positive good". The Republican advocates of "free labor", used the idea to indicate the superiority of Northern institutions as well as economic power as an outcome of their system of labour which emphasized the freedom of the individual. The debate over the political control of the Territories thus came to be posed as a contest between the two systems of labour--free and slave. It is by examining the concept of "free labor" projected by the Republicans, that we can come to grips with the complex attitudes of the North towards the blacks and to the exigencies of national politics.

The Northern concept of "free labor" arose from the prevailing economic organization of the North as a rising capitalist region. While the industries were as yet confined to the North-east, the mid-Western region was becoming a region of great importance due to the development of agriculture. Of considerable importance were the growing links between the new agricultural areas of the West and the industrial North-east.

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5 This section has drawn the major idea of the "free labor" concept from Eric Foner, Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War (New York, 1970); see also Bernard Mandel, Labor: Free and Slave (New York, 1955), pp. 163-6.
Douglass C. North has pointed out that these links were forged on the basis of a mutual need for markets, credits and trade, and were built up through the growth of an East-West railroad network displacing the North-South waterways as the prime mode of transportation. It was on this network that agricultural produce from the mid-West fed the rising urban and industrial centers of the North-east. It was on these networks, too, a steady stream of settlers moved westwards to better their station in life by procuring a piece of the cheap and abundant land available and labouring on it for their own economic advancement. These settlers were comprised both of the earlier group of working-class Americans, as well as immigrants—skilled labourers from the strife-riven Germany and illiterate Irishmen fleeing the terrible famine of 1846. It was this background that gave rise to the concept of "free labor".

One manifestation of this was the tremendous appreciation of labour itself as a primary virtue. Dignity of labour was a constant theme of the Northern ethos. Horace Greeley, editor of the influential New York Tribune, and a leading Republican ideologue of the period, saw "labour" as any "useful doing in any capacity or vocation." Abraham Lincoln himself voiced these feelings in even more elevated terms. In 1859, Lincoln stated the belief that "labor is prior to, and independent of capital... in fact, capital is the fruit of labor."


7 Horace Greeley, Hints Towards Reforms in Lectures, Addresses and Other Writings (New York: Harper & Brothers, (footnote contd.)
William Henry Seward, the New York Republican leader who had coined the phrase "irrepressible conflict," to characterize the North-South conflict, drew an equally invidious distinction between "labor states and capital states." For him, naturally, the slave-holding Southern states belonged to the latter category based as they were on the investment on labour of human beings where the labourer (the slave) was treated as capital. In the "labor states," on the other hand, the economic system depended on "maintaining and developing...[the] natural personality...generally with the privileges of citizenship [of the labourer]."

We see thus, that the Republican concept of labour was a product of the expanding, enterprising and competitive society the Party operated in. The conception of labour encompassed a much wider definition. The farmer labouring on his land, the agricultural labourer, the small businessman and the independent craftsman were all included in the definition. This was a natural outcome of an economic system which was, as yet, still in the first stages of industrialization. The belief that there

1850), p. 300; Abraham Lincoln, "Address Before the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 30 September 1858," in Roy P. Basler et al., eds., The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln (New Brunswick, 1953), 8 vols., vol. III, p. 478 (Hereinafter referred to as C.W.). The importance of these views is underlined by the fact that Lincoln used this portion of his speech, word for word, in his first Annual Message to Congress on 3 December 1861, see vol. V, p. 52.

existed in antebellum America a system with an infinitely upward social mobility was fundamental to those who voiced the Republican ideology and towards whom those ideas were addressed. Thus, Lincoln saw "advancement,—improvement in condition" as a natural concomitant of the Northern "free" society.

Lincoln himself bore witness to this possibility. "From the log cabin to the White House," or the image of a "rail-splitter" were the potent images with which Lincoln ascended in politics. There were other self-made men like Henry Wilson who rose from the lowly occupation of a cobbler to be a Senator of Massachusetts. Similarly, Nathaniel P. Banks, rose from humble beginnings to become Governor of Massachusetts. That most politicians of the North and mid-West took care to project their humble beginnings was an index of the egalitarian political milieu of the times.

Behind this seemingly modest self-view lay the arrogance of the self-made man in a capitalist ethos. Along with this view was a mythical view of the Northern society. As Zacariah Chandler, the influential Michigan Republican put it: "A young man goes out to service...to labor...for compensation until he


acquires money enough to buy a farm...and soon he becomes the employer of labor." Lincoln put his view of the great cycle of upward social mobility in the North in almost the same words. As he saw it, the majority of the Northern society consisted of those who were "neither hirers nor hired." In such a view, men who laboured all their lives making a living—the working class—owed it, according to Lincoln to "a dependent nature which prefers it [the poverty of such a situation], or improvidence, folly, or singular misfortune." Horace Greeley too blamed poverty on personal traits rather than the existing social and economic circumstances.

This was the ethos of the capitalist system arising in the North. Thus it had its own brand of privileged persons. Even as a young man in 1830 Lincoln put forward the view that "privileges of government should go to those who assisted in bearing its burthens." Thaddeus Stevens noted that the class "who own the soil, and work it with their own hands, are the main support of every free government." Stevens himself rose from the poor family of a farmer who had worked part-time as a cobbler. Lincoln categorically stated that he was against any "war on property, or owners of property," as in his view, the "industrious and sober" labourer of today was bound to become the property-owner of tomorrow.

11 Congressional Globe, 35 Congress, 1 Session, p. 1093; A. Lincoln, n. 7, pp. 478-9; Greeley, n. 7, p. 326.

12 A. Lincoln, "To the Editor of Sangamo Journal, 13 June 1836," C.L., vol. I, p. 48; Congressional Globe, 31 Congress, 1 Session, Appendix, p. 142; see also Faun F.

(footnote contd.)
The fact that politicians stressed their humble antecedents was, however, no indication that they strove to work for the interests of the class they had emerged from. The political outlook of the Republican Party was firmly wedded to that of nascent capitalism, expressing at that time the outlook of the small independent entrepreneur. George Rogers Taylor has documented the fact that there had already emerged by the middle of the nineteenth century, a distinct labouring or working class which had little upward mobility. While he points out that it was "somewhat easier" for farmers and labourers to rise to positions of wealth, it was true strictly in a relative sense only. Those who rose in life were likely to emerge from upper--and upper middle--income groups. The perceptions of the early leaders of the Republican Party though in all likelihood sincere, were, in fact, erroneous.

There was another component to the Republican ideology. This was the idea that the abundant land in the West provided the best opportunity to those who wished to advance in life from the status of labourer to that of a property owner. In the 1850s, immigration to the United States from Europe increased by leaps and bounds. In the first half of the decade alone 1.5 million immigrants mainly from Ireland and Germany landed in the


U.S. Though many of the Germans were skilled workers, most of the Irish were unskilled. The bulk of these immigrants landed in the ports of the North-east and one inevitable consequence was that the wages of the workers, both skilled and unskilled, began to fall below what was regarded the minimum level. This also helped to retard the development of a trade union movement.

The idea that Western lands provided the safeguard against the evils of wage-labour in North-eastern factories was another important Republican belief. The belief had its antecedents in the activities of the land reformers of the 1840s, George Henry Evans and his followers in the labour movement, Andrew Johnson and other supporters of the tenant farmers in the South and the West. These reformers had hoped to see an end to land speculation and monopolization that had characterized the usage of the American public lands. Their efforts were directed towards introducing legislation which would appropriate the public lands exclusively for providing relief for wage-earners and poor tenant farmers. This belief became the foundation for an agitation for a Homestead Act which was an important plank of the Republican Party from 1856 till the Act's actual passage in May 1862. Horace Greeley was one of the foremost advocates of this Act through the columns of his influential New York Tribune.

Between 1846 and 1855, some 3 million immigrants came into the United States. This represented some 12 per cent of the population of the U.S. at that time. Most of these immigrants settled mainly in the North. See Historical Statistics of the United States from Colonial Times to 1957 (Washington, D.C., 1960), Series C-88-14, p. 57; sec also Kevins, n. 4, vol. II, pp. 272-3 and 186-7; Taylor, ibid., p. 297.
Republican agitation for keeping the Western lands safe from "slave labor" was thus intrinsically linked to the demand for the Homestead Act to provide cheap land for "free white labor."

David Wilmot whose "Proviso" to exclude slavery from the land acquired by conquest from Mexico had begun the great movement in the North to prevent the extension of slavery, had seen in his actions a move to "preserve to free white labor a fair country...where...my own race...can live without the disgrace which negro slavery brings upon free labor." Thus, William Henry Seward assailed the South for "resisting the destiny not more of the African than that of the white races.... The white man needs this continent to labor upon. His head is strong, and his necessities are fixed. He must and will have it." Lyman Trumbull, Senator from Illinois, speaking in Chicago in 1858, asserted that the Republicans wanted to have nothing to do with blacks, free or slave. "We, the Republican Party," he declared, "are a white man's party. We are for free white men and for making white labor respectable and honorable, which it can never be when negro slave labor is brought into competition with it."

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While Western and Northern politicians railed against the introduction of slave labour into the Territories, they erected barriers against all blacks from entering their regions. The essence of the Republican doctrine was the exclusion of all blacks from the Territories and, as we will see later, from the United States as well. These ideas can be seen as an expression of white nationalism as well.

These views expressed the appeal of the Republican Party. The potency of the appeal cannot be doubted, as a land hungry, anti-black North sought to pit itself politically against the South which attempted to preserve a vicious, anachronistic, but profitable institution of black slavery. The projection of Western migration as plank of Republican policy gave it a shape which argued against any extension of slavery into these lands. The axiom that the introduction of slavery, or indeed any blacks, would depress the value of white labour became the rallying point on which the Republican Party made its spectacular appearance in the North. In the election of 1856, its candidate John C. Fremont secured 32 per cent of the popular vote as compared to the 45 per cent secured by the winning candidate James Buchanan.

_Globe, 25 Congress, 2 Session, p. 944; cited in the Appendix in Francis P. Blair, Jr., The Destiny of the Races of this Continent: An Address Delivered Before the Mercantile Library Association of Boston on the 26 January 1859 (_Washington, D.C.: Duell and Blanchard, 1859_), pp. 29-30; Berwanger has shown how the policy of excluding even free blacks went back to the 1830s when Ohio, Indiana and Illinois had adopted statute restrictions against their settlement in those states. The rise of the antislavery feelings, though in the main limited to a desire to prevent the extension of slavery, went along with a general black-exclusion policy._
In addition to this, the Republicans made an impressive showing in the state legislatures in the North and the mid-West. As a matter of fact, the tally of electoral votes showed that if Illinois and Pennsylvania had not voted for Buchanan, Fremont would have won.

In the years following the election of 1856, the ideological battle between the North and the South intensified. For the reasons outlined above, the Northern position began to sound increasingly antislavery. As a matter of fact, as the battle shaped up, Republican ideologues, borrowed heavily from the abolitionist writings especially on the economics of slavery while remaining quite immune to the moral arguments presented by them. The South came under a withering attack from the North which turned around the Southern assertion of the "positive good" of slavery to celebrate Northern institutions as being more "free" and Northern economy as being more efficient as it was based on "free" labour. Into the yawning divide between the Weltanschauung of the North and the South, were the conflicts over the Fugitive Slave Act and the Federal land policy. Whether Northern institutions were, in fact, superior to those of the South did not seem to matter, what mattered in the 1850s was the creation of two distinct sectional identities based on mutual fears, perceptions and commitments towards the events of the 1850s.

The Black Question and the Republican Party

As for the blacks, it was apparent that the Republican
ideology which sought to protect the interests of the Northern whites, would have little to offer them either in terms of social and political rights or in terms of a place in the economic system. The poor free blacks had to be content with being the lowest rung of the Northern society, the so-called "mud-sill." As for slaves and slavery, the Republican Party had no distinct stand but that that the institution ought to be left alone to flourish or wither within the geographical limits decided upon by the Missouri Compromise of 1820.

As the Republican leaders viewed the Northern scene in the mid-1850s, they realized the necessity of providing more than just a critique of slavery and a call for a halt to its expansion. The Republican Party did oppose the Dred Scott decision which denied blacks any claim as citizens of the U.S., they did so not because the decision denied black citizenship rights but because it also struck down the Missouri Compromise as being unconstitutional. Such a decision which threatened to open all of the U.S. to slavery, struck at the heart of the Republican doctrine and paradoxically enough, defenders of black rights found themselves making common cause with those who sought to assert "white supremacy." To provide an answer for the paradox which increasingly forged a common identity of interests between the abolitionists and them, the Republicans had to come up with the most vexing of problems--the place of blacks in American society.

The Republican answer to the question of the place of blacks in American society was disarmingly simple--they denied
hir a place at all. They regretted the fact of slavery but were more concerned about the supposed effects of slave labour on the "free white" labourers. From this their stand coalesced around a position that criticized the institution of slavery and opposed its extension into the new Territories. They felt that the black was an alien element to America and that slavery was a historical mistake. They were, however, no advocates of emancipation, on the other hand, if slavery were to be confined to the area defined by the Missouri Compromise of 1820 and by the Compromise of 1850, most Republicans would have little quarrel with the South.

The idea of deporting the blacks outside the limits of the United States went back to Thomas Jefferson's assertion that there existed little possibility for the creation of a bi-racial society in the U.S., especially as the blacks were so clearly "different" and possibly inferior to the whites. Jefferson's solution was that since the blacks and the whites could not interact as equals, they, the blacks, must be removed to some point outside the United States. More than half a century later, Jefferson's ideological successors saw little to change the views of the illustrious drafter of the Declaration of Independence. Like Jefferson, they were convinced that the blacks were inferior to the whites and hence the question of equal rights for the blacks did not arise. Since their vision of America was that it was to be a white nation, they too arrived at the position that the deportation of the blacks outside the boundaries of the United States was the best answer to
the black "problem."

The Republican advocacy of colonization of blacks is seen best by looking at the views of Abraham Lincoln, a man who always professed to represent the views of the mainstream of the Party. Lincoln's views on slavery and race owed a considerable debt to the views of Henry Clay, the great Kentucky politician who had engineered the Missouri Compromise as well as the Compromise of 1850. Clay had been a strong supporter of the American Colonization Society and, in his later years, the President of the Society. Delivering a eulogy for Henry Clay in 1852, Lincoln spoke feelingly on Clay's supposed devotion to the cause of emancipation. Lincoln praised Clay's work on behalf of the Colonization Society which had sought to "return to Africa her children...torn from her by the ruthless hand of fraud and violence." Lincoln lamented the failure of the attempt by the Society to colonize blacks in Liberia which he attributed to the heavy expense involved. Concluding the tribute, Lincoln expressed his own support to such endeavours which, in his opinion, did not affect "races or individuals."

Lincoln's advocacy for the idea of deportation was also linked to his view that the only solution to the issue of slavery was the gradual and compensated emancipation of black American

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slaves. As a Congressman from Illinois in 1849, he had even put forward a proposal for the gradual and compensated emancipation of blacks in the District of Columbia. Nothing came of this proposal but it was an indication of the line of thinking he was to pursue as President of the nation.

In the early 1850s Lincoln shaped his ideas on slavery but within the parameters outlined above. In 1854 his ideas emerged with increasing clarity. In a speech at Springfield, Ill., on 4 October 1854 Lincoln put forward his views on blacks thus:

... my first impulse would be to free all the slaves, and send them to Liberia,—to their native land... but the sudden execution of such a scheme is impossible.... What then? Free them all, and keep them among us as underlings? Is it quite certain that this better their condition?... What next? Free them, and make them politically and socially, our equals? My own feelings will not admit of this; and if mine would, we well know that those of the great mass of white people would not.... A universal feeling, whether well or ill-founded, cannot be safely disregarded. We can not, then, make them equals.

From this conclusion, Lincoln noted that some "systems" of gradual emancipation might be adopted "to solve this question."

Lincoln was to develop this theme in the Senatorial campaign against Stephen A. Douglass in 1857. Lincoln began to put forward the idea of racial separation as the way to solve

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the problem of slavery and race adjustment in America. Lincoln maintained that while the Republican Party platform did not openly advocate this line, "a very large proportion" of the Party accepted the proposition that "opposition to the spread of slavery" was identical to the advocacy of a policy of racial segregation. This segregation Lincoln averred, could best be served by an actual physical separation of the races—necessarily by colonization. Lincoln's measured remarks on the subject indicate the importance he attached to it. He stated:

I have said that the separation of the races is the only perfect preventive of amalgamation. I have no right to say that all the members of the Republican Party are in favor of this, nor to say that as a Party they are in favor of it. There is nothing in their platform directly on the subject. But I can say that a very large proportion of its members are for it, and that the chief plank in their platform—opposition to the spread of slavery—is most favorable to that separation.

Such separation, if ever effected at all, must be effected by colonization. The enterprise is a difficult one; but "where there is a will there is a way"; and what colonization needs most is a hearty will. Let us be brought to believe it is favorable to, or, at least, not against our interest, to transfer the African to his native clime, and we shall find a way to do it. (20)

When Lincoln spoke of "our interests" he was without doubt referring to the interests of white Americans. The firmness of his resolve to bring about the separation of the races was to be tested in the Civil War.

In the Senatorial campaign with Stephen A. Douglas, Lincoln did not project his views on colonization. Ever cautious, he did not find it necessary to put forward schemes when they did not have any great popular demand. At that time there was no groundswell in favour of colonization in Illinois and hence Lincoln ignored the issue. To indicate his commitment for the colonization idea, Lincoln resorted to another stratagem. He quoted a large portion of his speech delivered at Peoria two years earlier which included his remarks on sending blacks back "to Liberia—to their own native land."

What emerged sharply in the Senatorial contest was Lincoln's position on the political equality of blacks and whites. Even in the "radical" Peoria speech of 1854, Lincoln had stated the possibility of social equality between blacks and whites was remote. "My own feelings," he had noted, "will not admit of this, and if mine would we well know that those of the great mass of white people would not." Lincoln, the up-and-coming mid-Western politician indicated that he for one would not stay out of step with public opinion.

Lincoln's position came out most sharply when Douglas attempted to brand him and the Republican Party with "Negrophilism". Lincoln categorically stated in the Charleston, Ill., debate that "...what I would most desire would be the separation


of the black and white races.... I will say then, that I am not now nor ever have been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races." It was left to other Republican leaders to put forward the idea of colonization as a means of preserving the racial "purity" of the American nation.

The Republican Party's plan for the deportation of blacks was the brain child of the Blair family, Francis Preston Blair Sr., and his sons Francis Jr., and Montgomery, who were leading Republicans from the slave state of Missouri. The Blairs' were themselves slave-holders but their motivation in projecting a deportation plan was purely political. Eric Foner has pointed out that such a plan was a necessary pre-condition towards building up the Republican Party in the slave-holding regions. Appealing to the white tenant farmers, the Republican Party hoped to convince them that their policy was the only one that could look after the interests of the poor whites supposedly impoverished by the presence of slave-labour in their region. Francis Jr. was to become the first Republican Congressman from a Border state and Montgomery was to become Post Master General in Lincoln's Cabinet.

The Blairs' proposed that land be acquired by the United States in Central America to resettle the blacks. These colonies which would be aided and protected by the United States, would


24 Eric Foner, n. 5, pp. 268-72.
become the nucleus of a region which would on one hand settle the race problem in the United States, and on the other hand help bring the region under U.S. control.

Towards this end, the Blairs began a massive campaign in the North to gain support for their scheme. On 14 January 1858, Francis P. Blair Jr. moved a resolution in the House of Representatives requesting the setting up of a select committee to explore the possibility of establishing a colony outside the U.S. for blacks "now free, or that may hereafter be free."

Blair claimed that while several of the Northern states had restricted black emigration to free states, and the South was bent on expelling its own free blacks, it was the duty of the whites to whom the blacks had given loyal service, to help them resettle in areas climatically congenial to them. To garner support for his plan, Blair drew up a vision of an immense black empire in the Central Americas which would be under the tutelage of the U.S. and help in the exploitation of the natural resources of the region.

Francis P. Blair Jr.'s address on the "Destiny of the Colored Races of this Continent" took him to Boston where he put forward his ideas to the local Mercantile Association. Blair declared that, even assuming that the whites were a superior race, it could not provide any justification for the enslavement of the blacks. On the other hand, he pointed out that the existence

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25 Congressional Globe, 35 Congress, 1 Session, pp. 293-8. Blair circulated the copies of his speech to many of the prominent personalities of the time including abolitionists like Gerrit Smith.
of blacks within the United States had perverted American institutions. The most pernicious effect of slave labour, he argued, was its adverse effect on the value of labour itself. The inference was that the blacks were responsible for this even if it was due to reasons beyond their control. Blair lamented the fact that the Dred Scott decision implied a negation of the "manhood" of the blacks. This negation, by implication, would logically extend to even the poor whites who were "constrained to labor in the service of another." Since the blacks, by their unfortunate presence were the cause of such a serious obstacle to the growth of "free labor," the only answer was a physical separation of the races, which would, in Blair's opinion, be a "deliverance" for both the white and the black races. Blair also saw justification for such a policy in the lessons taught by the history of the world. According to him, history had shown that "marked distinctions between races indicate... their adaptability to the various climates of the earth...."

The blacks were, in Blair's opinion, wholly unsuited for the temperate zone. With the help of the various states and the Federal government, a resettlement of blacks in Central America could be undertaken. These settlements Blair pointed out to the merchants of Boston, would help open up the region and would serve the U.S. just as India served Britain.

Senator James R. Doolittle of Wisconsin was another enthusiastic supporter of this scheme. Doolittle pointed out to Thurlow Weed that colonization would help Republicans in the

26 Blair, n. 16, pp. 3-26.
North as well as in the "doubtful" states of Illinois, Indiana and Pennsylvania where the Republicans would have to make a breakthrough to capture the Presidency in 1860.

On 14 July 1858, Senator Doolittle moved a resolution parallel to the one moved by Francis P. Blair Jr.'s 14 January resolution referred to earlier. Doolittle's resolution requested the Senate's Committee on Foreign Relations "to inquire into the expediency of acquiring by treaty... in Central America the rights and privileges of settlement and citizenship" for blacks. Doolittle argued that a large number of blacks themselves wanted to leave the United States because of the prejudice they were encountering.

Support for the Blair plan was also forthcoming from other quarters. Senator Preston King of New York speaking on a bill to admit Oregon as a state declared, with some condescension: "We owe something to these blacks people, who have served us for so many years...." and he urged Congress to consider the plans for establishing a colony for free blacks.

From Illinois, one of the "doubtful" states, came strong support as well. Governor Rissell wrote to Francis Jr. that he considered his plan most feasible. Lyman Trumbull, the Republican Senator from Illinois, stated that the Republicans, and he personally, wanted to have nothing to do with blacks at all.

27 Eric Foner, n. 5, p. 271.
28 Congressional Globe, 35 Congress, 1 Session, p. 3034.
29 Ibid., p. 2027.
whether they were free or slave. As for himself, however, he was in favour of "the project...for colonizing our negroes, who are willing to go to some place in Central America..." Responses also came in from other eminent Northern whites like Benjamin Silliman of Yale, editor and publisher of the *American Journal of Science and Arts* who advocated the removal of the blacks as they would be in the future, a "dangerous" element if allowed to live in the United States. Theodore Parker, the great Unitarian minister, even viewed Blair's January 1858 speech as an antislavery speech equal to those delivered by Charles Sumner, the pro-black Republican Senator from Massachusetts.

Eric Foner points out that by 1860, Blair and Doolittle's activities had garnered considerable support for colonization within the Republican Party. Besides the Governor of Illinois, Governors Kirkwood of Iowa, Randall of Wisconsin, and Dennison of Ohio supported colonization. Equally impressive was the list of Congressional leaders supporting the scheme. Preston King, Henry Wilson, Lyman Trumbull, Hannibal Hamlin, James Harlan, Benjamin F. Wade, C.C. Washburn, Charles Sedgwick and James Ashley numbered among its supporters.

Surprisingly enough, the colonization scheme was not accepted as an official plank of the Republican Party in 1860. Eric Foner has suggested that this was due to the fact that

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30 See the Appendix in Blair, n. 16, pp. 29-30; Benjamin Silliman to Francis P. Blair Jr., n.d., p. 33.
31 Eric Foner, n. 5, pp. 276-8.
Despite the strong support for the plan, especially in the Midwest, there were powerful Republican leaders like Charles Sumner, Thaddeus Stevens, William Henry Seward, Salmon P. Chase, Owen Lovejoy and others, who had strong reservations on any scheme for even the voluntary deportation of blacks. Equally important was the fact that in spite of the expression of support by the emigrationists like Delany, Holly, Whitfield and J. Dennis Harris, Blair's ideas were not at all appreciated by the majority of the black community. In 1858, the emigrationist movement was in the doldrums and the emigrationist support to Blair was of little consequence.

The Crisis of 1860

The prospect of a Republican victory in the election of 1860 brought to a head the sectional crisis that had plagued the United States for over three decades. The narrow margin of victory became a minor factor when compared to the fact that for the first time a sectional party had gained control of the Presidential office. Northern politicians had often accused the earlier Pierce and Buchanan Administrations of being pro-South, but all said and done, the Democratic and the Whig Party had been national parties depending on support both from the North and the South.

The Democratic Convention that met in Charleston on 23 April 1860, split as soon as it had to formulate a platform. It

Ibid., see also Blair, n. 16, pp. 35-39.
approved a plank calling for the acquisition of Cuba but could not agree on further guarantees for slavery in the territories or on the condemnation of Northern personal liberty laws. Most of the Southern delegates withdrew. The rump convention adjourned on 3 May and reassembled in Baltimore where, on 18 June, Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois was nominated as a candidate of the Party.

Those who left the Democratic Party at this time, moved to another hall and nominated John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky as their candidate. Meanwhile, a new Constitutional Union Party held its Convention at Baltimore on 9 May. Consisting of former Whigs and Know-Nothings, its primary aim was to evade the entire issue of slavery in the interests of saving the Union. John Bell of Tennessee was selected as its candidate for Presidency.

The Convention of the Republican Party assembled at Chicago on 16 May. The gains made by the Party in the state and local elections of 1859 lent confidence to the Party's deliberations on the platform for the ensuing election. A forceful platform affirming the Declaration of Independence and denouncing the threats of disunion was drawn up. The platform denounced the Buchanan Administration's Kansas policy, the Dred Scott decision, and the continuance of the slave trade. The Party also disapproved of John Brown's raid but affirmed their commitment for Territories free of slavery. Three additional planks were taken up which indicated the Republican commitment to foster the growth

of a capitalist America. Firstly, the Republican Party gave a call for increasing the tariff to a high level to protect American industries. Secondly, the platform endorsed the call for a Homestead Act to provide cheap land to white settlers from the American public domain. Thirdly, the Party affirmed its opposition to any change in the naturalization laws to reassure the millions of European settlers seeking a home in the United States. After three ballots, Abraham Lincoln got the Presidential nomination and Hannibal Hamlin became his running mate.

The election of 1860 was fought in an atmosphere of bitterness and tension engendered by the decade-long sectional crisis. The hardening of the positions of the two sections was evident from the platforms adopted earlier. The Southern fire-eaters supporting Breckinridge not only refused to accept any limitation on the area of slavery as demanded by the Republicans, but actually affirmed a platform calling for the acquisition of Cuba to extend the area under slavery. On the other hand, the Republicans, scenting victory, were in no mood to provide any guarantees for the continuance of slavery and reaffirmed their commitment to the limitation of slavery to the line drawn up for the Missouri Compromise. The Constitutional Union Party was committed to ignoring the entire issue of slavery in the interests of the Union. In such circumstances, Senator Douglas' commitment to "popular sovereignty", or a scheme whereby which each Territory would hold separate referendums to decide on the question of slavery, did have a touch of compromise which could however, no

34 Ibid., pp. 31-33.
longer work under the then prevailing situation.

Given the fact that the lines of sectional division had already taken shape, the results of the election provided no surprises. Voting was strictly on sectional lines. The entire North and the mid-west voted for Lincoln providing him with 180 electoral votes. Douglas with 12 electoral votes, carried only Missouri and a part of New Jersey. Bell with 39 electoral votes, carried the Border States of Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee. The rest of the South voted for Breckinridge who received 72 electoral votes. In terms of popular votes, the Republican victory was less impressive. Lincoln received some 1,800,000 votes as compared to Douglas' 1,300,000 votes. Breckinridge got some 850,000 votes and Bell 580,000.

Even before Lincoln's election, Southern extremists had threatened to leave the Union in the event of a Republican victory. Now such a possibility became a reality and the South reacted harshly. Within weeks of the election, Southern states led by South Carolina began to leave the Union and by the time of Lincoln's inauguration, seven states had left the Union. The lame-duck Buchanan Administration made little efforts to halt disunion. Efforts of the Congress to evolve a compromise came to a naught. The events of the previous decade indicated that any compromise, to be effective, would have to provide an answer for that single issue that had most bedevilled the relations between the sections—slavery.

On 13 December 1860, Senator John J. Crittenden of Kentucky put forward a series of compromise measures before the Senate. Crittenden's proposals included constitutional amendments which would extend the Missouri Compromise line (the line 36° 40' of latitude which had defined the area where slavery would operate) to the Pacific Ocean as well as provide guarantees for the perpetual existence of slavery south of that line. Other proposals put forward by Crittenden would have prohibited the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia unless so desired by the residents of the District as well as by those of the districts of Maryland and Virginia bordering the District, and then too only with compensation to the slave holders. Once again, as in previous occasions, compromise measures indicated a willingness on the part of the white leadership of the United States to sacrifice the black community. The Crittenden proposals were one of the first and possibly the best known of the compromise measures in the winter of 1860. These proposals were taken up by a special Senate Committee of Thirteen set up the same day.

Lincoln and several of the Republican Party leaders, while not overly concerned over the fate of the blacks, opposed any extension of the Missouri Compromise line, aware that this amounted to an extension of slavery, in short, a negation of the much publicized Republican position on the question. Lincoln had, on 15 December, three days prior to the Crittenden

36 Congressional Globe, 36 Congress, 2 Session, pp. 119-14.
proposals, categorically declared in a letter to John A. Gilmer that "on the territorial question, I am inflexible." In a letter to Thurlow Weed he maintained a similar stand but advocated the withdrawal of the opposition to the Fugitive Slave Law.

What were to be the semi-official views of the Republican Party were a set of compromise proposals put forward by William Henry Seward, the former Governor of New York who, at that time, commanded even greater prestige within the Party than Lincoln himself. Seward's proposals, put forward on 24 December, were based on suggestions made by Lincoln himself. With the utmost circumspection, Lincoln put forward his verbal suggestions to Seward through Thurlow Weed, the New York Republican Party "boss" who was a close confidante of Seward. As Seward put it:

With the unanimous consent of our section I offered three propositions to the Committee of Thirteen which seemed to cover the ground of the suggestion made by you through Mr. Weed as I understood it.

First: That the Constitution should never be altered so as to authorize Congress to abolish or interfere with slavery in the states.

Second: That the fugitive slave law should be amended by granting a jury trial to the fugitive....

Third: resolution for their legislation to all States to revise concerning personal liberty laws...

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It was clear, then, that faced with the threat of secession, the Republican Party leadership was willing to sacrifice for the freedom of the blacks who were held in bondage at that time. Besides this, they were also ready to sacrifice the interests of the Northern free blacks by withdrawing their opposition to the Fugitive Slave Act by calling for the various states in the North to repeal the personal liberty laws which had helped bypass the provisions of the Fugitive Slave Act in the 1850s.

In the winter of 1860 several other compromise measures came up. Jefferson Davis, Robert Toombs, Stephen A. Douglas put forward plans to effect a compromise. Besides these moves, a Peace Conference was convened in Washington, D.C., sponsored by the Virginia Legislature. Twenty-one states sent delegates to the Conference which was convened in February 1861. The outcome of the Conference was a set of proposals similar to the ones put forward by the Crittenden plan. Most of the plans however, failed in the face of increasing intransigence on both sides.

There were however one set of proposals which were accepted by Congress which indicate the tenuous commitment to democracy that the Republic Party had when it came to deciding the fate of the black Americans. These were proposals which came through the House Committee of Thirty-three. The proposals had been authored by Charles Francis Adams of Massachusetts and

Henry Davis of Maryland and blessed by Soward. The first proposition passed was on 27 February by 137 votes to 53. This called for a strict adherence to the Fugitive Slave Law by appealing to the Northern states to repeal their personal liberty laws. On 28 February the House passed the second proposition by a vote 133 to 65 which was, in fact, a Constitutional amendment that would forever bar the Congress from abolishing or interfering with slavery. On 2 March, the Senate approved of this measure by a vote of 24 to 12. A measure calling for the admission of New Mexico as a state was, however, defeated but another calling for the right of trial by jury in cases arising out of the Fugitive Slave Act squeaked through by a vote of 92 to 83.

Of all these measures, the proposed amendment to the Constitution perpetuating slavery was the most striking. For the first time in American history, slavery would have been provided Constitutional guarantees. By agreeing to limit its own powers, Congress would have left the entire issue to the various states thus making its eradication more complex and thus difficult. However, though the measure had passed both the Senate and the House, it had failed to get the required two-thirds majority in the House. That it did not eventually gain acceptance can be ascribed to many causes. Potter has argued that the Republican Party sabotaged its acceptance. That is possible, but Lincoln himself supported the measure when he declared in

40 Congressional Globe, 36 Congress, 2 Session, pp. 1285 and 1403.
his inaugural speech that he had "no objection to its being made express and irrevocable." More important, perhaps, was the timing of the measures which, coming as they did, at the end of February 1861, were already too late. By that time, most of the Southern members had withdrawn from the Congress.

In the end all measures of compromise failed. American historians have agonized over the winter of secession, analyzed the events and the role of the participants and have not come up with any clear-cut answer to this final act of the drama of the 1850s. It would hardly be in the province of the present writer to do so. Nevertheless, some aspects of the question must be commented upon. Firstly it must be noted that despite the claims of the Republican Party leaders, it was slavery and not the question of the Union which dominated the discussions of that time. Secondly, the slavocracy with which the North was willing to provide guarantees for the existence of slavery within the area defined by the Missouri Compromise indicated the strength of the anti-black opinion of the time. In short, the Republican Party and Northern business interests were quite willing to preserve the peace if only the blacks had to bear the costs. The New Jersey legislature endorsed the Crittenden plan. Rhode Island repealed its personal liberty laws. Maine altered its own liberty laws to mollify the South. Many other


42 Kenneth M. Stampp, And War Came, the North and the Secession Crisis, 1860-1861 (Binghamton, N.Y., 1950).
such measures were proposed and discussed. In all of them, a singular insensitivity towards the monstrous institution of slavery and to the events of the time comes out sharply.

Lincoln, the War, and the Blacks

Lincoln's inaugural speech was conciliatory towards the South. He quoted from his earlier speeches indicating that he had no intention of interfering with slavery in the slave states. He called on Congress to support the Constitution and its laws including those relating to the fugitive slaves. He further attempted to assuage the South by declaring his tacit support for the Constitutional amendment referred to earlier which would provide guarantees for the continuance of slavery south of the Mason-Dixon line. By Lincoln's reading, the amendment would only be an explicit acceptance of what was implicitly accepted by the Constitution. He declared that he personally had no objection towards such an intent "being made express and irrevocable." According to Richard Hofstadter, Lincoln's primary object was to save the Union, and towards this end, his immediate goal was to "bring back the South with slavery intact."

The bombardment of Fort Sumter on 12 April, however, decided the issue. Lincoln was now compelled to meet secession

43 Ibid., pp. 130-1; Philip S. Foner, Business and Slavery: Merchants and the Irrepressible Conflict (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1941), pp. 266-73.

44 A. Lincoln, "First Inaugural Address--Final Text, 4 March 1861," C.W., vol. IV, pp. 263-4, 269-71; see also Hofstadter, n. 10, p. 162.
face to face. There could be no equivocations, especially with the rising war fever gripping the North. Lincoln gave the call for 75,000 state militia men to defend the Union.

Blacks responded enthusiastically to Lincoln's call for volunteers and offered their services to the authorities. It is remarkable, but not surprising, that the blacks in the North were quick to recognize that the war begun by the Union ostensibly to bring back the dissident states back to the Federal compact, would have profound consequences for their race. In addition, had not the race participated under the American flag at every national crisis that the Republic had faced from the time of the Revolutionary War itself? (This theme will be discussed in the following chapter.) The Lincoln Administration showed no eagerness to induct the blacks into the armed forces. Its attitude was to avoid, as far as possible, any indication that the war was being waged to overthrow the "established institutions" of the South. The stress, as we have seen, was on the preservation of the Union. Lincoln insistently viewed secession as a constitutional issue. However, as the events of the previous months had shown, black slavery was tightly interlinked to the sectional crisis that had led to the war. It was not that Lincoln was alone in this attitude. On 22 July the

45 Allan Nevins, The War for the Union: The Improvised War, 1861-1862 (New York, 1959), 4 vols., vol. I, pp. 74-75. A. Lincoln, "Proclamation Calling Militia and Convening Congress," C.W., vol. IV, pp. 331-2. It is to be noted that Lincoln did not refer to himself as "Commander-in-Chief," a title that he used when he issued the emancipation proclamation.
House, and on the 25th, the Senate, overwhelmingly approved of a resolution moved by John J. Crittenden and Andrew Johnson stating that "this war is not waged upon our part...for any purpose...of overthrowing or interfering with the rights or established institutions of...the Southern States." 46

Most Northern leaders thought the war would result in an easy and quick victory for the North. Lincoln's political aims—that of bringing back the South into the Union with slavery intact—beguiled him into a similar prognosis. The hopes of the Union were pinned on a campaign that would lead to a swift capture of Richmond, the capital of the Confederacy. These hopes were dashed when the Union armies were signally defeated at Bull Run on 21 July 1861. With the hopes of an early prosecution of the war against the Confederacy dashed, the Republican Party divided itself over the issue of using the institution of slavery in the war against the Slavocracy. This division between the "moderates" and the "radicals" widened as the difficulties faced by the Union in organizing the war mounted. Lincoln was, given his background, firmly "moderate." From the very beginning, the difficulty of fighting a war against the South without touching the institution of slavery became apparent. 47

From the very outset, the blacks themselves precipitated the issue. What the North refused to recognize, the black slaves realized—that escaping across the Union lines meant freedom.

46 Congressional Globe, 37 Congress, 1 Session, pp. 222-3 and 258-60.
The black question could not be wished away. Within a month of the commencement of the hostilities, black slaves began to express themselves with their feet. Slaves began to escape from their bondage the moment they were near the battle lines. These fugitives underlined the black perspective of the war as a war of liberation. By June 1861, the "irrepressible negro" had begun a spontaneous policy which, in due course, created a major propaganda appeal for the antislavery movement of the North. The abolitionist press was quick to utilize this fact and the early Northern reverses helped the passage of a Confiscation Act on 6 August 1861. This Act provided that all cases of seizure of property in slaves were to be handled by Federal courts, though only that property actually used in aid of the rebellion came under the purview of the Act. Lincoln signed the Act reluctantly; yet, as he had no clear policy of his own, he had to react to the issues as and when they came up.

On 30 August 1861, Major-General John C. Fremont, the Republican Presidential candidate of 1856, and the Commander of the Department of Missouri, issued a proclamation freeing the slaves in the areas under his operational command. Lincoln was appalled at this move, which, in his opinion, would frighten away the pro-Union elements in the slave-holding Border States. He ordered Fremont to retract, declaring that such a move "will


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alarm our Southern Union friends [in Missouri]."

This episode was followed by an altercation between the Secretary of War, Simon Cameron and President Lincoln. In his annual report for 1861, Cameron asserted the right of the government to arm and employ former slaves against rebels. Lincoln summoned the Secretary and ordered him to delete that portion of the report.

A similar situation arose again in early 1862 in the area under the command of Major-General David Hunter. On 13 April 1862, he issued a proclamation liberating all slaves in the immediate area of his command in Georgia free. He followed up this action by declaring martial law in the area under his control in Georgia, Florida and South Carolina and, on 12 May, declared all blacks in these states free. Lincoln was stunned at this "precipitate" step. He immediately ordered Hunter to revoke these orders and issued a Proclamation disavowing acceptance of any such measure.

Lincoln was, at this time, busy attempting to solve the black issue in his own manner. He was attempting to rally around


the pro-Union Border States towards accepting a plan for the gradual and compensated emancipation of slaves. Hoping to lay the foundations of peace with the South in this way. To Salmon P. Chase, the Secretary of the Treasury who wrote to him requesting him to endorse Hunter's actions, Lincoln testily replied: "No commanding general shall do such a thing, upon my responsibility, without consulting me."

Lincoln's Proclamation of revoking Hunter's orders was addressed to the South. He quoted a Congressional resolution calling for gradual and compensated abolition of slavery. Concluding with perhaps a touch of pathos, Lincoln added: "The change it [the resolution] contemplates would come like the dews of heaven.... Will you not embrace it?" The increasing tempo of the war and the rapid changes in public opinion in favour of the blacks that it was bringing, did not seem to affect Lincoln. For him, the only way to end the harsh system of slavery was in a manner which would most gently handle the slaveholders.

In the winter of 1861, the pressure from the "radical" section of the Republican Party on Lincoln began to mount. At the onset of the war, the abolitionists had often faced the wrath of the public and on several occasions some abolitionists had even been mobbed. By the winter of 1861-1862, the


abolitionists gained tremendously in popularity as they took a hard line against the South in contrast to the soft approach of the Lincoln Administration. When Wendell Phillips spoke in New York on 19 December 1861, the Cooper Union hall was packed and even the street outside was crowded. The crowd applauded Phillips when he called for radical measures to prosecute the war. The moderate New York Times even reported the annual meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society in January 1862, noting that while the "respectable" journals had earlier poked fun at such gatherings, abolitionist societies now had "an importance which hitherto had not been theirs," and thus deserved the newfound respect that they were receiving from the important journals of the land.

Lincoln's Annual Message to Congress at the end of 1861 did not in the least reflect the changing political climate of the North. His only recommendation with regard to the blacks was to propose the acquisition of land to colonize the blacks freed by the Confiscation Act of 6 August. He reiterated his earlier belief that the war was for the preservation of the Union and not for changing the "peculiar institution" of the South. He insisted that under his leadership, the war would not "degenerate into a violent remorseless revolutionary struggle."

The Congress was not quite satisfied with Lincoln's

55 National Anti-Slavery Standard, 23 December 1861.
approach on the question. On the very next day, the House of Representatives refused to re-endorse the Crittenden-Johnson resolution of July declaring that elimination of slavery was not the aim of the war. On 5 December, Senator Lyman Trumbull moved a confiscation bill which, when passed in the summer of 1862, was to be the harbinger of the Emancipation Proclamation. Senator Thaddeus Stevens offered a resolution calling for the emancipation of blacks. Owen Lovejoy introduced a bill in the House making it a penal offence for any military officer to return fugitive slaves. 58

Gradual and Compensated Emancipation Schemes

While the temper of the country was changing rapidly, Lincoln seemed to be out of step with the times. This was not, however, true. Lincoln had his own definite views on tackling the events that were unfolding. Lincoln's plan for the solution of the black issue involved his long held belief that blacks were an alien element in the United States. When by the operations of war many blacks began to gain liberty, and the possibility that in the event of Union successes even greater numbers would gain freedom, Lincoln began to think of the problem of race adjustment within the United States. Lincoln's search for a solution was bound by two parameters—his opinion that the Constitution did not confer any right to the Federal government to legislate on slavery and secondly, his own view of the place.
of the blacks in American society.

Lincoln’s views were apparent from a plan he drafted in November 1861 for the gradual and compensated emancipation of slavery in Delaware, the smallest pro-Union slave-holding state. Lincoln intended to use this scheme as a test-case for a general proposal which would firstly take in all the pro-Union slave states and then, hopefully, the states in the Confederacy as well.

By Lincoln’s plan, Delaware’s 2,000-odd slaves would be freed in a gradual manner between the passage of the bill and 1893 as and when they crossed the age of 35. All those born after the passage of the bill would be freed automatically. For each slave emancipated, the slave-holder would be paid $400. Unfortunately for Lincoln, even this "liberal" plan was not satisfactory for the Delaware slave-holders and the scheme was rejected by the state legislature and was not put before Congress.

This was to be the fate of all the schemes of compensated emancipation which Lincoln was to put forward subsequently. The attempt to preserve outmoded institutions with a war raging in the nation and with moral rhetoric at a premium, was futile. More so than any institution, slavery was integral to the circumstances culminating in the war. It was a catalyst and the elements all in one. If Lincoln as the Commander-in-Chief of the Union wanted to prosecute the war with vigour, it was becoming

58 Congressional Globe, 37 Congress, 2 Session, pp. 6, 15-16, 18-19, 33-34.

apparent to all, except probably Lincoln himself, that an answer would have to be provided for this most vexing problem. By his actions Lincoln indicated that not only was he out of step with the rising tide of "radical" sentiment, but that he could not even carry the pro-Union slave states behind his schemes of compensated and gradual emancipation.

The pressure for the emancipation however, grew apace. In the spring of 1862, several of the measures debated through the winter began to gain passage through Congress. As the successes of the forces of freedom drew nearer, Lincoln sought to deflect their radical thrust. Thus, on 6 March he made his first specific recommendation on the subject of slavery. In a message to Congress, Lincoln urged the passage of a joint resolution by which the Federal Government would "cooperate with any state which would adopt the policy of gradual abolition of slavery...." The resolution would empower Federal aid to "compensate for the inconvenience public and private, produced by such a change of system." The Congress was, however, moving according to its own time-table. On 10 March the Senate approved of the House measure, originally proposed by Owen Lovejoy, to prohibit army officers from returning fugitive slaves.

On 10 April, Congress approved Lincoln's draft resolution of 6 March calling for the gradual and compensated emancipation of slaves in the Border States. But on the following day it also

passed a bill calling for the compensated but immediate emancipation of the slaves of the District of Columbia. When the measure reached the President, there was some doubt whether he would sign it. He had several objections, mostly relating to the possibility that the Border States would shy off the large scheme he had in mind. Nevertheless, Lincoln signed the bill on 16 April declaring that his hesitancy to do so was more due to "expediency" rather than from any constitutional objections. "I am gratified," he noted, "that the two principles of compensation, and colonization, are both recognized, and practically applied in the act." Lincoln was not too happy with the amount provided for compensation to the slave-holders in the act and neither with some textual omissions which would, in his opinion deprive certain categories of slave-holders their "just" compensation. The $300 per slave which would accrue to the owners of Washington, D.C.'s 3185 slaves was considered inadequate by Lincoln but not the sum of $100,000 appropriated for colonizing the freed slaves, albeit voluntarily. The sum, which would work out to roughly $33 per slave was considered enough to rehabilitate the blacks freed from the degradation of bondage.  

61 Lincoln outlined several of his views on the subject in a private letter to Horace Greeley. This letter, before the passage of the bill through Congress, indicated Lincoln's desire that the "substantive" feature of the bill--compensated emancipation--be brought from "below" by the Border States rather than Congress. See Letter to Horace Greeley, 24 March 1862, C.W., vol. V, p. 169. Lincoln's letter signing the bill into an act is revealing in that it brings out his objections to the provisions of the bill while affirming his intention of signing it. See "Message to Congress," 16 April 1862, C.W., vol. V, p. 192; for the text of the act see Congressional Globe, 37 Congress, 2 Session, p. 348.
There were those who opposed emancipation of the blacks of the District in the first place. Senator Garrett Davis of Kentucky even proposed that the deportation of blacks be made compulsory in the bill. He declared that any policy "of humanity to the negro in this city must keep in mind justice to the white population of this city." Nevertheless, as Revins points out, it was the commitment of the "moderate" Republicans to the policy of voluntary deportation which brought around support that ensured the passage of the bill.

The debates around the District of Columbia Emancipation Act as well as the measures which favoured the blacks, however infinitesimally, were accepted by the North without much rancour. Paradoxically, the lack of any spectacular victories by the Union armies brought the prospect of emancipation closer.

We have shown as to how several of the measures pressing towards the emancipation of the blacks were emerging from the perception of a section of the Republican Party that only by attacking the "peculiar institution" of the South could victory be assured for the North. In the summer of 1862, the grand Union army assembled by General McClellan failed in its thrust toward Richmond. The failure of this much awaited campaign, stirred on the Congress to even more drastic measures. This was best reflected in the debates going on around a measure introduced by Senator Lyman Trumbull in the December of 1861. This bill was a confiscation measure designed to punish the South by

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not only allowing for emancipation as a military necessity in certain cases, but also to provide for the use of blacks in the war effort, if only in a supportive capacity.

As the debate on this drastic measure took place, Lincoln was spurred to even greater vigour to keep the whole black question from precipitating into a general and unconditional emancipation. To prevent Congress, which was far more "radical" on this issue, from gaining control of the black question, Lincoln came up with yet another plan for a gradual and compensated emancipation.

On 12 July, Lincoln invited the Representatives and the Senators of the Border States and read out his formal appeal to them to support compensated emancipation. Lincoln reproached them for not supporting his resolution of 6 March noting that had they done so, "the war would now be substantially ended." He appealed to them to see the folly of hoping that war could end with nothing changed.

Lincoln was clearly perturbed by the manner in which the events were shaping up. The steps taken for the benefit of the blacks in the earlier half of 1862 were clearly not to his liking. Lincoln warned the pro-Union slave-holders:

The incidents of the war can not be avoided. If the war continue long, as it must, if the object be not sooner attained, the institution

63 Nevins, n. 62, p. 139.
Lincoln pointed out that along with such a decision was his determination to ensure that the blacks so freed would be deported to South America where there was land in abundance and cheaply available. It can be argued that Lincoln did not himself espouse the views expressed above in their totality. It is possible that he drew up a grim picture for the pro-Union slave-holders to implement a policy he believed in sincerely. However, one can not but remark at the cynicism expressed in the idea of advocating a policy ostensibly dedicated to shortening the war in terms of cutting losses of property in human beings.

On 14 July the majority of those who had assembled to hear his message sent their reply. They refused to accept the policy of compensated emancipation. The Border States were not willing to accept Lincoln's argument that compensated emancipation would prevent "unconstitutional" emancipation of the slaves in the control of the Confederacy. Lincoln's warning pointing to Gen. Hunter's abortive proclamation as well as the Congressional measures adopted in favour of the blacks, was rejected by those whom the President wanted desperately to help.

Lincoln's desperation can be adduced from the fact that

65 Ibid., p. 318.
66 Ibid., p. 319n.
on the very day that he received the negative reply of the majority of the delegates who had met him on the 12 July, he sent a draft of a bill on compensated emancipation to the Congress. While a minority opinion did back his plan, it did not justify the draft bill he sent to the Congress on 14 July.

The draft bill outlined in the most concise way possible Lincoln's views on as to how the problem of slavery ought to be tackled. It declared:

...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...equal to the aggregate value, at--dollars per head, of all the slaves in such State.... (67)

Lincoln clearly believed that it was the right, if not the prerogative, of the states to act upon the question of slavery. It was for this reason that he had acted reluctantly on all such measures emanating from Congress. Secondly, he believed that any measure emancipating slaves ought to be accompanied by provisions compensating those who had held men as property.

Lincoln's advocacy of compensated and gradual emancipation was, we we will show, accompanied by yet another pernicious view, the belief that there was no place for the black man in the United States--as free men or as slaves. It is indeed surprising that a man of Lincoln's political acuity had to remain

consistently behind the mood of the North in the summer of 1862. This was reflected in the passage of the second Confiscation Act on 17 July 1862.

The Second Confiscation Act

Lincoln clearly refused to accept the destruction of slavery as a principal aim of the war. On the other hand, he clearly indicated his awareness of the fact that the war would end in the ending of the "peculiar institution," and consistently took steps to ensure that in the event of this result, the slave-holders, at least those who were for the Union, would not be inconvenienced. Whatever his actual beliefs, at the middle of 1862, it was painfully clear that Abraham Lincoln was completely out of step on this question with the Congress, if not with Northern public opinion.

It was the failure of the Union thrust towards Richmond which brought back this measure from obscurity in a Congressional conference committee in July 1862. The essence of the bill was simple. It intended to free all the slaves in the areas technically under rebellion. By freeing these slaves, some two-thirds of all the blacks in bondage, the "radical" Republican sponsors of the bill hoped to crush the institution of slavery once and for all. It is however open to speculation as to how many of the proponents and supporters of the bill were actuated by genuine humanitarian impulses or by a desire to "carry the war to Africa" to crush secessionism.

68 Williams, n. 51, pp. 148-9; see also Randall, n. 49, pp. 358-63.
Even before the bill was passed, Lincoln had been ready to veto it. When the bill was passed, Lincoln took the unusual step of signing the bill into an act and appending his tentative veto message along with his acceptance to the measure. It was clear, however, that the whole spirit of the measure went against Lincoln's long-held views.

Lincoln found it difficult to oppose the sections of the Act that called for the punishment of those engaged in rebellion. Nevertheless, while not actually objecting to the provision that freed the slaves of such persons, he found the expression of the provision "unfortunate." His objection related to his belief that the Congress could not and should not take it upon itself the right to directly intervene in eliminating the "peculiar institution" and leave it to the states themselves. What Lincoln objected to primarily was to certain clauses which would affect not only the property of the rebels but of their descendants as well. Lincoln's objection was thus to the adoption of a revolutionary policy of confiscation which may have transformed the land-ownership pattern of the South for ever. The effort to ensure that the basic land and labour relations would not be altered indicates more than anything else Lincoln's innate conservatism in viewing the post-Civil War United States.

On 15 July, Congress, taking heed of Lincoln's objections, and probably aware of an impending veto, passed a joint resolution...


70 Ibid.
which purported to be "explanatory" of the bill. Lincoln was satisfied and signed the bill appending the draft of the passage of veto he had intended to send to Congress. 71

The most significant section of the Act of 17 July was Section 9 which followed sections 1 and 2 in providing for the punishing those engaged in or abetting with those in rebellion. The section declared:

That all slaves of persons who shall hereafter be engaged in rebellion against the Government of the United States, or who shall in any way give aid or comfort thereto, escaping from such persons and taking refuge within the lines of the army; and all slaves captured from such persons or deserted by them and coming into the control of the Government of the United States, and all slaves of such persons found on (or) being within any place occupied by rebel forces and afterwards occupied by the forces of the United States, shall be deemed captives of war, and shall be forever free of their servitude, and not again held as slaves. (72)

The section was so all embracing that its passage meant the liberation of all the black slaves within the area of the Confederacy in the event of the success of Union arms.

The next section of the Act ensured that all the rules enacted till then prohibiting the military from returning fugitive slaves of rebels, would become a law applicable to all the authorities. Section 11 of the Act authorized the President to provide for the colonizing of all those blacks who were willing to leave the U.S. Though this measure was accompanied by an appropriation of $500,000 for the purpose,

71 Ibid., pp. 323n and 324n.
72 Congressional Globe, 37 Congress, 2 Session, p. 413.
it was clearly put in as a sop to Lincoln. As James G. Randall bluntly puts it, it was introduced "to assist in obtaining Lincoln's signature to a measure he strongly disliked."

The passage of the second Confiscation Act was the watershed of the war. It made clear the intent of the North to fight the war with all the means in its power. Not all proponents of the measure had been particularly committed to a policy of black emancipation. Nevertheless as the first year of the war passed, they realized that to fight a war without touching the weak point of the South was folly. They decided to strike at slavery even while realizing that it meant giving the black community a signal that blacks could become free men within the United States. Despite the now almost ritualistic affirmation of the policy of colonization by Northern leaders, the acceptance of blacks within American society was becoming a certainty. Although the battle for equality was still to be fought, the first big step had been taken.

The Lincoln Administration's Colonization Schemes

We have shown how Lincoln, the shrewd politician that he was, lost the initiative with the regard to the solution of the black question that had insistently intruded upon the American scene from the very onset of the war. It was only through sheer tenacity that Lincoln had managed to retain in his hands the executive power for several of the decisions that

had taken place in the first half of 1862 with regard to the black question. The most important area of authority that the President retained was with regard to the policy of deportation of the blacks to places outside the United States.

We have shown that the essence of the pre-War Republican policy towards the blacks was to deny them any place within American society either as free men or as slaves. That this policy was converted to a crusade against slavery and the South, was an important element in the complete dominance of the Republican Party in the North and the mid-West in 1860. From the very outset of the sectional crisis that followed the election of 1860, Republicans bent over backwards in assuring the South that their policy calling for a halt of the extension of slavery was in no way directed against the institution of slavery itself. As a matter of fact, as we have shown, the Republican formula of compromise envisaged the acceptance of a constitutional amendment guaranteeing forever the institution of slavery within the area of the line decided by the Missouri Compromise and confirmed by the Compromise of 1850.

In spite of the professed disinterest evinced by the Lincoln Administration towards the blacks, they kept on intruding into the centre of the stage. Within a month of the outbreak of war, black slaves began to express themselves with their foot. At the end of May 1861, three fugitive slaves appeared at the Union lines near Fortress Monroe, a point on the Atlantic on the Virginia coast flanking Richmond. Major-General Benjamin F. Butler, the commander of the fortress declined to return them
to their owners. Butler used the ironic expedient of declaring this human "property" as contraband of war and "seized" the blacks and put them to work on Union emplacements. Thus, purely by the ingenuity of a local commander, a policy was inaugurated that had far reaching consequences.

The policy of refusing to return black fugitives to pro-Confederate slave-owners was not, at this point, a generally accepted one. In June 1861, several Union officers advocated a policy of returning all escapees. In the West, General Halleck returned all fugitives. In July 1861, General Winfield Scott, commander of the Union army, wrote to Brigadier-General McDowell to allow owners to reclaim fugitives even if the owners were from the area owing allegiance to the Confederacy. Major-General Butler was no abolitionist. In the opening months he had drawn the ire of the abolition-minded Governor of Massachusetts, whose troops he had then commanded, for offering to put down a rumoured slave-uprising in Maryland. The opinion of the Governor John A. Andrew, was shared by a large section of the public in the state that had produced men like William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips. Aware of this fact, Butler, himself later Governor of that state, took this stand which brought him instant acclaim.


75 Benjamin F. Butler to Winfield Scott, 24 and 27 May 1861, O.R., 1 Series, vol. II, pp. 52, 648; Benjamin F. Butler, Autobiography and Personal Reminiscences (footnote contd.)
Praise was also forthcoming from the Secretary of War, Simon Cameron, who congratulated Butler on thus resolving the situation in a manner "sensible to the embarrassment" faced by Northern soldiers in fighting the Confederacy. He noted, however that "the question of their final disposition will be reserved for further determination."

By the end of July there were some 900 fugitives working in the Union emplacements around Fortress Monroe as labourers. Butler's idea of using such escaped slaves as labourers on defensive emplacements was an appealing one to the North and was made the most of in the propaganda of the abolitionist press. Even the moderate New York Times agreed that Butler's solution was the best answer to a "really embarrassing question" of handling slaves of people who one was at war with.

The Confiscation Act of August 1861, however, had a major loophole in that it was only applicable to such slaves whose owners had knowingly used them in aid of the Confederacy. This act had to be supplemented on 6 March 1862 by "additional article of the war" that specifically prohibited Union soldiers from returning the slaves of Confederate masters.

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77 New York Times, 2 June 1861.

This "policy" of escaping to the Union lines adopted by the slaves was embarrassing to Lincoln as well. His response was made evident in his Annual Message to the Congress in December 1861. Lincoln was now seized by an urgency as the black slaves showed their determination to gain freedom and decided to intrude into the white man's war. Lincoln's proposal was that the Congress should begin to undertake steps to deport these fugitives who had gained freedom to any place outside the United States. He emphasized, however, that this deportation should be voluntary.

Black slaves of the Confederates did not only escape into the Union-held territory, they also fell into the hands of the Union army as a result of military operations. In November 1861, almost 10,000 black slaves were liberated by a Union operation which captured the Sea Islands, off the coast of the Confederate ports of Savannah and Georgia. The Sea Islands grew some of the finest cotton in the South and there was thus a large concentration of slaves there. At the approach of the Union navy, the slave owners fled leaving the slaves and their plantations. We will detail the consequences of this situation in the next chapter. However, the important fact was that Lincoln and his colleagues were brought face to face with the possibility that hundreds of thousands of slaves may inadvertently fall into the hands of the Union. A policy for the relief as well as for the future of such blacks would have to be

Lincoln's solution, as we have shown, had a single plank—the voluntary deportation of blacks outside the U.S. As if on cue, immediately after Lincoln's Annual Message of 3 December 1861, other Republican leaders fell in behind the President in supporting colonization schemes. On 9 December, Representative John Gurley from Ohio, for example, introduced a bill in the House calling for the confiscation of all the slaves of the Confederates and their deportation to a special area to be situated in Florida.

In the winter of 1861, the debates on the call for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia began to take place. It was in the course of these debates that the Postmaster General of the Lincoln Administration, Montgomery Blair pressed for the deportation of blacks to Central America. Montgomery, was, of course, the brother of Francis P. Blair Jr., one of the authors of the antebellum Republican deportation schemes.

As the debate on the measure came to a close, the advocates of black deportation stepped up their pressure. Senator Garrett Davis of Kentucky, even proposed that any measure of emancipation must be accompanied by steps to colonize the blacks,

81 Congressional Globe, 37 Congress, 2 Session, pp. 35-36, 1867.
82 New York Times, 7 March 1862.
compulsorily if necessary. Forced deportation, however, did not get much support, if only for the fact that it would have been impossible to execute. Speaking on 11 April 1862 Francis P. Blair Jr., one of the most enthusiastic backers of Lincoln's colonization ideas, opined that only Lincoln could undertake such a wise policy as he had himself been born and bred in a slave-holding state. Indeed, Lincoln, who had been reared in Kentucky, did show, as we have indicated earlier, a remarkable sensitivity to the problems of the Border States in the Civil War. According to Blair, Lincoln could best understand the problem created by the prevalence of slavery for the non-slaveholding poor whites. Blair's thesis meshed perfectly with Lincoln's ideas. He declared: "We can make emancipation acceptable to the whole mass of non-slaveholders of the South, by coupling it with a policy of colonization." This policy far from being abhorrent, was the "greatest boon" that the whites could confer on the blacks, noted Blair. Compared to any policy of keeping blacks in a permanently inferior status, which would probably be the case even after any emancipation, colonization "will build them up as a great nationality, in a country peculiarly adapted to their physical organization, in which, their natural vigor and endurance make them superior to all other races...."

If Blair reiterated his old call for the colonization of blacks based on his understanding that the blacks were

83 Congressional Globe, 37 Congress, 2 Session, pp. 1631-?, 1634.
climatically unsuited for the U.S., other plans were even more extravagant and exotic. Senator James R. Doolittle of Wisconsin, who had in 1858, along with Blair, moved the Senate to consider a colonization scheme, now came up with an astounding plan. Firstly, he moved that $100,000 be appropriated to help in the colonizing of the 3,000 blacks who would be freed by the District of Columbia emancipation bill. Secondly, he put forward a scheme for the mass deportation of all the blacks from the United States.

Doolittle's plan envisaged the use of one huge ship that could carry 17,000 blacks at a time or six ships that could carry that number at one time that would shuttle between Central America or Haiti and the U.S., carrying a total of 634,000 blacks out of the country in one year. Putting forth an array of statistics, Doolittle calculated that even if 350,000 blacks could be shipped out in one year, the country would be rid of all the blacks by 1877. By removing only 100,000 blacks a year, Doolittle's figures showed, that by the turn of the century, 1907 to be exact, the U.S. would become an all-white nation.

On 16 April 1862, Congress passed the bill emancipating the blacks in the nation's capital. While the Act appropriated $1 million to compensate the owners of the slaves, it appropriated a princely sum of $100,000 "to aid in the colonization and settlement of such free persons of African descent...as may

84 Congressional Globe, 37 Congress, 2 Session, Appendix, pp. 94-101.
desire to emigrate to the Republics of Hayti and Liberia, or such country beyond the limits of the United States as the President may determine."

Thus, for the first time in its history, the United States Government became committed to a scheme of deporting the blacks outside the country. Till then all the efforts, principally those centering around the activities of the American Colonization Society, had been at the behest of private societies and individuals. In this sense, this phase represented an extremely dangerous situation for the blacks of the U.S. With neither law nor a voice in the government to protect them, it was only the operation of the war as well as the practical impossibility of any scheme of deportation---voluntary or otherwise---which would foil the plans set afoot to deny them a rightful place in the United States.

Fortunately, however dear the idea of colonization was to some of the Republicans, graver issues confronted the nation at that juncture. The North was at that time desperately attempting to organize all its resources towards fighting a war that no longer seemed to be the short one it had been thought to be at the beginning. In spite of its immense superiority in men and material, in the spring of 1862, Union armies were making little headway against the Confederacy.

As the Union army's offensive towards Richmond failed again in the summer of 1862, the debate on the Second

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85 Congressional Globe, 37 Congress, 2 Session, p. 348.
Confiscation Act became sharper. Earlier we have outlined the circumstances relating to its passage in detail. In essence, the Act gave freedom to all blacks who were liberated by the operations of the Union armies. There was, however, no provision for rehabilitating these black slaves who had emerged from centuries of bondage in degradation and poverty.

Section 12 of the Act was the only one that pertained to the rehabilitation of the blacks. This declared:

...the President of the United States is hereby authorized to make provision for the transportation, colonization, and settlement, in some tropical country beyond the limits of the United States, of such persons of the African race, made free by the provisions of this act, as may be willing to emigrate, having first obtained the consent of the said country to their protection and settlement within the same, with all rights and privileges of free men.

Along with the passage of the Act, a sum of $500,000 were appropriated to fund the provision related above. There was another section of the Act which could be used to provide relief to the newly freed blacks. By Section 11 of the Act, the President of the U.S. was "authorized to employ as many persons of African descent" as he felt necessary for the effective prosecution of the war. It is quite remarkable that the question of dealing with black slaves that could be freed by this Act received so little attention. Even the appropriation for colonization was meagre for the result it was intended to achieve.

86 Congressional Globe, 37 Congress, 2 Session, Appendix, p. 413.
Following the Congressional appropriations for colonizing the blacks freed by the District of Columbia Emancipation Act as well as by the Second Confiscation Act, the Lincoln Administration began to undertake schemes for colonizing the blacks. Lincoln's Cabinet began to receive several proposals with regard to colonization in the Western Hemisphere. Promoters, politicians, and even American diplomats in South America busied themselves in coming up with schemes with an eye to the profits they might entail. Colonization projects for the Isthmus of Panama, Brazil, the British West Indies, Honduras, Costa Rica, Dutch Guiana, Ecuador, Guadeloupe, Guatemala, Haiti, Martinique, New Granada and Santo Domingo were sent up to the State Department under William Henry Seward. Typical of these projects was the one sent up by Colonel W. Raalsoff, the Danish representative in Washington, D.C. He wrote to the Secretary of State, expressing the willingness of the Danish Government to accept black emigrants in the Danish colony of St. Croix in the Carribean.

The gesture was not an altruistic one however as Raalsoff noted: 'The Danish Island of St. Croix, in the West Indies, which is a sugar growing country, has for several years past been checked in its progress towards increased prosperity...by the want of manual labor....' It was the shortage of labour

which prompted several Latin American and European countries to welcome emigrants not only from the United States but even from India and China as well. Most of these countries offered to provide varying degrees of political rights and guarantees for blacks, but, emphasized the importance of admitting black labour in schemes that involved some form of indenture.

Nevertheless, the promoters of most of these schemes were private individuals. When Secretary Seward actually addressed an "international inquiry" to various countries on the subject of colonization he received a poor response. Several South and Central American countries protested vehemently to the Lincoln Administration against making them objects of American munificence.

The Chiriquí Colonization Project

Just as the Latin American countries were entering their protests against the American Government's interest in promoting immigration in areas under their control, Lincoln moved


towards encouraging a project in the region of the Isthmus of Panama. This was a region known as Chiriqui. The project was the brain-child of a New York financier, Ambrose Thompson who controlled a company known as the Chiriqui Improvement Company which owned the coal and railroad concessions in the region. Thompson had initially offered the coal to the U.S. Navy but this offer had not been accepted.

Lincoln was apprised of this scheme by his brother-in-law, Edwin W. Edwards. The President immediately ordered Caleb Smith, Secretary of the Interior to examine the prospects of using the region for its natural resources as well as for resettling newly freed blacks. Lincoln proposed an expedition to study the region, but it did not come off.

In April–June 1862, Lincoln was busy soliciting projects as well as trying to iron out the difficulties of the Chiriqui project. Following the emancipation of blacks in the District of Columbia, Lincoln sought to use his advocacy of black deportation to bring around the Border State legislators to support his schemes for the compensated emancipation of blacks. This had been the feature of the bill that had coaxed Lincoln's signature. On 12 July 1862, on the eve of the second Confiscation Act referred to earlier, Lincoln issued a last minute


appeal to the Border State Congressmen to accept the principle of gradual and compensated emancipation of their slaves along with the firm assurance that his Administration would spare no efforts in evolving a scheme for the voluntary deportation of blacks outside the U.S.

In August 1862 Lincoln decided to directly pressurize the free black community to leave the United States. In the preceding months, Lincoln's "Agent for Emigration" James Mitchell, a former agent of the American Colonization Society, had made serious efforts to encourage black emigration, an effort, described by Frederick Douglass as being as futile as an attempt "to bail out the ocean." Now Mitchell got together a delegation of free blacks of Washington, D.C., and arranged for them to have an audience with the President.

The meeting took place on 14 August 1862. While the blacks listened politely, Lincoln expounded his views. He stated that blacks should leave the country as they had suffered much in America and had now brought much suffering to white Americans. He noted that without "the institution of slavery and the colored race as its basis, the war could not have existed." This expression of racism was not surprising since in Lincoln these views represented what had for a "long time been his inclination." He reiterated his view that their racial difference was of "great disadvantage" to the country. This was the "reason at least why we [the blacks and whites] should be

separated." Instead of considering measures to mitigate race prejudice Lincoln chose to advise the blacks to take themselves out of the United States and to go "where you are treated best." He requested the delegation to take up the cause of deportation which would, in his opinion, be as grand a gesture as would actually befit even white men!

Lincoln next proceeded to extol the Chiriqui project just around the time it was about to be discredited. He promised all aid to the blacks who would take up the project and even promised to "endeavor to have...the blacks made equals" of the other Central American people. It is surprising how, on one hand, he would have them "made equals" in Central America over which his writ did not run but had often expressed his inability to do so in the United States of which he was the President. The delegation gave him a polite hearing. However, a furore broke out in the Washington, D.C. black community and nothing came out of this effort.

Lincoln, however, persisted in his colonization schemes. In August 1862, Lincoln had appointed Senator J.C. Pomeroy of Wisconsin, as a "special agent" to promote the Chiriqui scheme. Bypassing Mitchell, Pomeroy was authorized to negotiate with the Chiriqui Improvement Company. On 12 September, the Secretary of the Interior signed a contract, which had been approved by Lincoln himself, with Ambrose Thompson. The contract


94 Ibid.
stipulated that, after an endorsement by Pomeroy, Thompson would settle 500 emigrants on 100,000 acres of land at $1 per acre of which 30 cents would go to the Company and the remaining amount would be spent on developing the area. A sum of £50,000 would also be advanced after Pomeroy had been satisfied by the quality of the coal. This amount would be repaid in the coal supplied to the U.S. Government.

What was curious about this contract was the fact that Lincoln had already apprised of the fact that the coal was of an inferior variety by the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, Joseph Henry, on 5 September 1862, just seven days before the signing of the contract that he had personally approved. Lincoln's Cabinet, too, was not happy about the project. A survey of the attitudes of the Cabinet officials indicates that only the Secretary of the Interior who had actually signed the contract supported the project. Finally, no efforts were made to undertake treaty arrangements with Costa Rica, where Chiriqui was located. On 29 September, the Costa Rican representative in the United States protested against the project which intended to foist American blacks on his country.

On the face of this and other protests from other Central American Republics, the project was suspended on 7 October, less than

95 Scheip, n. 90, pp. 432-3; Mitchell, n. 83, p. 25; see also C.2., vol. V, p. 371n which indicates that a letter of authority from Lincoln to Pomeroy was prepared for Lincoln's signature on 10 September 1862 but was not signed. See also T. Lincoln, "Approval of Contract with Arbross," Thompson," 11 September 1862, C.2., vol. V, pp. 412, 414n.
a month after the contract had been signed.

The Isle A'Vache Project

Of all the schemes brought before the Lincoln Administration for approval, the only one that "succeeded" was the Isle A'Vache project. On 30 December 1862, the Administration entered into a contract with one Bernard Kock to locate a colony of 500 blacks in the concession owned by him on that Haitian island. Kock had painted a glowing picture of the island and its resources and Lincoln's agent for emigration, James Mitchell, arranged the contract. For $50 a head, he agreed to transport 5,000 freedmen to the island and provide them with "comfortable homes, garden lots and churches." It was discovered that Kock was in league with some unscrupulous capitalists of Boston and New York to use the blacks as indentured labourers to grow cotton for the cotton-hungry North. Lincoln ordered a belated investigation and ordered Seward not to counter-sign the contract.


This was not the end of the scheme. A few months later, Paul 3. Forbes and Charles K. Tuckerman signed another contract with the Administration and then hired Kock to take some 500 emigrants to the island. On 14 April 1863, 453 emigrants actually set off for the island from Fortress Monroe. So fraudulent was the scheme that it was doomed to end in disaster. The conditions in the island, glowingly painted by Kock, were so miserable that those emigrants that did not die had to be rescued and brought back to the U.S. on the direct orders of the President in early 1864. Shortly after this miserable failure, Congress repealed all the funds appropriated for the colonization of the blacks.

Lincoln's efforts towards colonization make, as James G. Randall puts it, "a dismal story." The above schemes indicate to what extent Lincoln was willing to surrender his usual caution to undertake a policy which he believed in so firmly. Apologists of Lincoln to the contrary notwithstanding, it is difficult to believe that a man of Lincoln's experience, shrewdness and knowledge of men, would have been completely unaware of the sordid implications of uprooting the blacks from the land to which their ancestors had been forcibly brought and which they had enriched with their toil and blood. Lincoln's clear innate racism becomes apparent from the fact that while he was willing to compensate the slave owners in his various schemes of compensated emancipation he exhibited little private or public concern

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98 Wesley, ibid., pp. 18-19; and Gresham, pp. 29-30.
for the millions of blacks who had to labour as slaves for generations and had been deprived of all the benefits of the great democracy that white Americans were wont to boast about.

As the President of the United States, the primary responsibility of articulating and executing a humane and democratic policy of transition for the blacks in America rested on Lincoln. That this policy failed to be the great experiment in democracy that it could have been was due to Lincoln's early conception, maintained till the end, that the black man was an inferior and an alien element in the American civilization.

Lincoln sought to put forward his ideas for the solution of the black issue with preconceived notions developed, as we have shown, over the decade of the 1850s. Lincoln's sole solution to the issue of slavery seemed to be limited to the advocacy of compensated emancipation. He viewed the race which had suffered generations of bondage in the same way he viewed poor whites—that free, and in their "native clime" they would be on their way to economic progress. "Compensated emancipation" was a policy that was not new in the history of the U.S. Betty L. Fladeland has shown in her study of the issue that it was never, in the entire history of slavery in America, an acceptable alternative to the slave-holders. In promoting it, just like in advocating colonization, Lincoln was flying against the face of the long held and rigid views of the slave-holders.

99 J.G. Randall, n. 73, p. 139.
The Emancipation Proclamation

When viewed after one year, the war seemed to have done precious little towards the liberation of black Americans. The President seemed to move backward on every issue that sought to advance the black cause even by a fraction. The pressure of war was creating an inexorable movement towards emancipation, nevertheless, while one must take note of the District of Columbia Emancipation Act and the Second Confiscation Act, one must not forget that for the first time, the Government of the United States, with approval of Congress, was committed to a policy of deporting the blacks, though with their consent, to places outside the United States. The march towards emancipation was not missed by William Henry Seward, the Secretary of State and next only in importance to Lincoln in the Administration. In a letter to the U.S. representative in Brazil, Seward summarized the situation after the passage of the Second Confiscation Act thus:

The nation has decided...that slavery shall not henceforth be extended under our flag over territories now free;...that the African slave trade shall never be revived or renewed;...that slavery shall be forever abolished within the federal District of Columbia...that slaves escaping or captured from disloyal masters...shall not be restored to slavery...that slaves so escaping or captured by national forces shall be employed as labor by them.... (101)

Throughout the summer of 1862, the abolitionists maintained a steady pressure on the government and the Lincoln

Administration. While they were not entirely unhappy over the District of Columbia Emancipation Act and the Second Confiscation Act, they realized that these measures were minor concessions. The Second Confiscation Act could theoretically free all the slaves if they were to be captured by the Union forces, nevertheless, given the dismal performance of the Union army at that time, it did not look too much like a general emancipation measure and nor was it intended to be. Even the measure, which was clothed in legal terms, could make each case a specific one which would require proof to show that the slave-owner was actually engaged in rebellion.

Speaking on 1 August 1862, Wendell Phillips delivered a blistering broadside against Lincoln. He dismissed Lincoln as "a first-rate second-rate man" who was committed to a policy of drift. He accused Lincoln of having "neither insight, nor provision, nor decision." That was not enough, he had even harsher words for General McClellan the Commander of the Union army. He declared:

I do not say that McClellan is a traitor, but I say this, if he had been a traitor from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, he could not have served the South better than he has done... and almost the same thing may be said of Mr. Lincoln. (102)

Though Phillips' language drew harsh criticism from various quarters, the "radical" pressure on Lincoln was not abated. On 20 August 1862, Forace Greeley published a letter in

his New York Tribune addressed to Lincoln purporting to be "The Prayer of Twenty Millions," expressing disappointment with Lincoln's policy towards the "rebels." He called on Lincoln to avoid being influenced by the "fossil politicians" of the Border States and to rigorously execute the punitive provisions of the Confiscation Act against the South.

Such was the influence of the "Prayer" and its author, that Lincoln took the unusual step of replying publicly to Greeley. Lincoln replied:

I would save the Union. I would save it the shortest way under the Constitution.... My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and it is not either to save or destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could do it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union.... (104)

Following the Second Confiscation Act, Lincoln had begun thinking in terms of an Emancipation Proclamation. Lincoln was all too painfully aware of the enormous pressure building up against his Administration especially since the Union armies were making little headway against the Confederate forces. His own predilection towards a "gradual and compensated" approach to liquidate slavery was increasingly appearing to be a policy of appeasement towards the South. Within a few days after reluctantly signing the Second Confiscation Act, Lincoln broached the


topic of emancipation to his Cabinet. He had, it seemed, already worked out a draft, and what he sought was, "incidental rather than primary advice" of his colleagues.

Lincoln pointed out to his Cabinet colleagues that he had come to a conclusion that emancipation "was a military necessity absolutely essential for the salvation of the Union...and that we must free the slaves or be ourselves subdued."

While most of his colleagues concurred with his view that emancipation was a necessary expedient to prosecute the war at this stage, there was dissent only from Montgomery Blair, the Postmaster General.

Lincoln's draft proposal led off from the Confiscation Act of 17 July calling for the punishment of all those who were "participating in, aiding, countenancing, or abetting the existing rebellion." He put forward his intention of freeing all slaves in the area of rebellion by 1 January 1863. However, the purpose of the proclamation was more declaratory rather than substantive. Lincoln hoped that by the actual date of the operation of the measure, rebel states would be coerced into rejoining the Union. For them, Lincoln had a pleasant alternative. He promised in his draft proclamation to recommend to Congress a measure to appropriate money to compensate them for the loss of their slaves which would then be freed by a gradual...

105 Randall, n. 73, p. 155.
106 Diary of Gideon Welles, n. 96, pp. 70-71; see also Diaries of Salmon F. Chase, n. 96, pp. 48-49; and also E.W., vol. V, p. 337n.
process. Using the carrot and the stick, Lincoln hoped that he could prevent the social cataclysm that he believed would accompany any immediate and general emancipation.

On 4 September, the Confederate army under General Robert E. Lee began its offensive by crossing the Potomac into Maryland and threatening both Baltimore and Washington, D.C. The invasion once again galvanized the North into action. Enlistments that had been falling off since the setbacks of the summer once again began to pick up. The battle that began at Antietam creek on 17 September was ferocious and bloody but while they did not succeed in destroying Lee's army, the Union forces were victorious in that they forced the Confederates to retreat. This incomplete victory after a long line of defeats was used by Lincoln to issue the preliminary emancipation proclamation. According to Gideon Welles, the Secretary of the Navy, Lincoln had accepted the outcome of the battle as an indication of Divine Will.

The Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation of 22 September 1862 opened with the theme that reunion, not abolition, was the object of the war. Lincoln designated himself as "Commander-in-Chief" in issuing the Proclamation, a phrase which, as Randall points out, he did not use even in the call for troops in April 1861.

As the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces of the Union, Lincoln reiterated his resolve of prosecuting the war

108 Randall p. 72 - 168
"for the object of practically restoring the constitutional relation between the United States, and each of states…in which that relation is, or may be suspended, or disturbed."  

The olive branch that the President held out to the South was in the form of a recommendation to the Congress that an appropriation be made to compensate all the loyal slaveholders or those who would agree to return to the Union fold by 1 January 1863. This compensation would be granted to those states willing to accept programmes of gradual or immediate emancipation. Lincoln also reiterated the resolve of his Administration to continue the efforts to colonize the blacks. Then came the core of the Proclamation. On 1 January 1863, Lincoln declared, all the persons held as slaves in states still in rebellion at that date "shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free."

The Proclamation was viewed in continuity with the Congressional legislation of the previous year that had inexorably brought it about. Lincoln included the Article of War of 13 March 1862 prohibiting military men from returning fugitive slaves, as well as Sections 9 and 10 of the Second Confiscation Act into the text of the Proclamation.

The tone of the Proclamation was clearly conservative. But, perhaps, nothing more could be expected of Lincoln. For


110 Ibid., p. 434.

111 Ibid., p. 435.
the first time, the President himself had, woefully belatedly though, seized the initiative. Till now, Lincoln had had to tail Congressional measures and at best exert pressure to have his point of view incorporated in the legislation adopted. Now for once Lincoln authored a policy which committed him to a policy of liberating all black slaves within the area of the Confederacy without compensation and immediately as of 1 January 1863. This step, Lincoln repeatedly emphasized, was based on his war-powers and was dictated by the exigencies of the war. It was not, and nor was intended to be, a democratic or even a humanitarian gesture.

Nevertheless, for all its weakness, the impact of the Proclamation was enormous, though three months of grace were given for its application. The most important aspect of this was in the complete alteration of the war-aims of both the parties. While the war was begun by the South to preserve Southern independence, the North had sought to preserve the Federal compact. After the Proclamation, notes Roland C. McConnell, "the war aims of each side...shifted. The South... ended up by fighting for slavery and southern independence while the North ended by fighting for freedom and preservation of the Union." Though the freedom was limited in scope and applicable to areas under rebellion, the Proclamation represented the most dramatic step towards freedom for the black Americans. All said and done at that time though, the Proclamation was, in actual

112 Randall, n. 73, p. 164.
fact, a declaration of intent.

In the months between the issuance of the Proclamation and its coming into effect, there was a tremendous amount of pressure upon Lincoln from the more conservative elements to modify and, if possible, revoke the Proclamation. In the Congressional elections of the autumn of 1862, the Democratic Party and other opponents of emancipation unleashed a barrage of criticism against the Proclamation. Appealing to Northern race prejudice and the fear that emancipation would unleash a huge army of destitute labour in the American market thus depressing the wages of the Northern workers, the Democrats made significant inroads into the Republican strength in the state legislatures as well as in the Congress.

Lincoln was naturally upset by the reverses of the Republican Party, but his own vacillation did not end. In a letter to Hannibal Hamlin, the Vice-President of the U.S. he noted that as regards the impact of the Proclamation, "my expectations are not as sanguine as are those of some friends." Lincoln did not give up his advocacy of colonization either. According to Gideon Welles, Lincoln repeatedly brought up the issue to the Cabinet stressing the importance of providing "an asylum for a race which we had emancipated, but which could never be recognized or admitted to be our equals."


Lincoln's Annual Message of 1 December 1862 underlined more than anything else his reluctance to see the day, fast approaching, when all blacks would be free. As part of the Annual Message, Lincoln proposed the passage of a constitutional amendment so that the strife that had torn the U.S. would "without convulsion, be hushed forever with the passing of one generation." To enable this, Lincoln proposed to keep one full generation of blacks in slavery till the year 1900.

By Lincoln's plan, all states emancipating their slaves by 1 January 1863 would receive money to provide as compensation.

The first article of Lincoln's proposed amendment declared:

> Every State, wherein slavery now exists, which shall abolish the same therein, at any time, or times, before the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred, shall receive compensation from the United States.... (116)

The rest of the draft outlined the mode of payment of this compensation.

The second article declared all blacks already free by the operations of war as "forever free." But the purpose of this article was to ensure payment for the slaves so freed to masters who had not actually been disloyal. The last article of the proposed amendment called for Congress to appropriate money to colonize free blacks, "with their own consent" to places outside the U.S.

Lincoln proudly put forward his plan on the grounds of humanity and expediency. But the humanity was for slave-owners. As he declared that the length of time—thirty seven years—would ensure that "those whose habitual course of thought will be disturbed by the measure will have passed away before its consummation."

The inspiration of the amendment to the blacks would be of a different nature. Addressing those who would think that the time-span of 37 years would be too great, Lincoln noted:

But it really gives them [the slaves] much. It saves them from the vagrant destitution which much largely attend immediate emancipation...and it gives the inspiring assurance that their posterity shall be free for ever. (117)

It is difficult to match the cynicism of these thoughts. Just a month away from the act that was to forever give him the title of the "Great Emancipator," Lincoln was putting forth a plan that would ensure the perpetuation of slavery, with the vehicle of the Constitution, till the beginning of the twentieth century. More remarkable was the fact that Lincoln, aware of the fact that immediate emancipation may take place very shortly, and realizing that "vagrant destitution" would follow, refused to address himself to the problem of providing relief to the blacks but instead, proposed continued enslavement and gradual abolition as a means to "protect" the blacks.

Benjamin Quarles has pointed out that nearly two-fifths of the Message related to compensated emancipation and colonization. Indeed, the Message was probably Lincoln's most candid

117 Ibid., p. 531.
exposition of his ideas on slavery. That it sounds more pathetic than cruel is in no small measure due to the complexity of Lincoln's thought regarding democracy, slavery and race. Lincoln took infinite pains to protect and advance the interests of his country. He regarded the U.S. as a white man's country. While he opposed any unjust treatment of the blacks, he was committed to preserving and fostering the interests of the white citizens of the country, as he considered the blacks as an alien race within the U.S. Thus Lincoln could provide for the compensation of slave-holders, even if they were at that time in a state of rebellion. For this reason, too, Lincoln found it difficult to provide for the relief and rehabilitation of the blacks.

On 1 January 1863, failing to get any response from the states in rebellion, Lincoln issued the formal Emancipation Proclamation. The Proclamation firstly designated the areas under rebellion and excepted Tennessee and parts of Louisiana and Virginia. Then it declared "...all persons held as slaves within any State, or designated part of the State, the people whereof shall be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free."

The Proclamation was based "upon military necessity," by President Lincoln who rejected the Secretary of Treasury Salmon P. Chase's advice that it be issued "as an act of justice warranted by the Constitution." The wording of the edict was

118 Quarles, n. 3, p. 133.
far from inspiring. Contained in it were warnings to the newly freed blacks "to abstain from all violence" and "to labor faithfully for reasonable wages."

However, once he was decided on the course, Lincoln went the whole way. He declared the intention of the North of using in "the armed forces of the United States" all persons declared free. Though they would be used mainly on garrison duties and to man the ships of the Union.

The blacks were not yet free since the South had still to be brought to its knees. The Proclamation was operative only in the areas still in the hands of the enemy. Lincoln did not see the irony of this. We have already outlined the reluctant manner in which Lincoln had acted with regard to the edict. His own explanation was quite candid. Writing to General John A. McClernand he noted:

I struggled nearly a year and a half to get along without touching the institution; and when finally I conditionally determined to touch it, I gave a hundred days after notice of my purpose. They—the Confederates—chose to disregard it, and I made the peremptory proclamation on what appeared to me to be a military necessity. And being made, it must stand.... (120)

The reaction in the North to the Emancipation edict was not that of universal rejoicing. James X. McPherson notes that while abolitionists tended to be critical of the limited nature of the Proclamation, they were on the whole, not too harsh on

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120 A. Lincoln to John A. McClernand, 8 January 1863, C.H., vol. VI, pp. 48-49. This letter was in response to some peace feelers sent out by some Confederate officers through the General.
Lincoln and welcomed the measure. There was also significant opposition to the emancipation of blacks. Capitalizing on the war-weariness of the North as well as its not-too-latent racism, the "Copperhead" Democrats and other opponents of emancipation denounced the measure. By the faltering steps taken on the issue by Lincoln himself, the great edict seemed to be less significant than it actually was. Nevertheless, as James G. Randall has noted:

Not only was Lincoln's emancipation of limited scope, where applied, it was beset by difficulty and delay...it was but a limping freedom that was launched by virtue of war power.... (122)

What was seen then and observed even now, the basic flaw of the Proclamation was its genesis as an edict based on "war power." But that was the only way Lincoln was prepared to look at it even eight months later. Writing to James C. Conkling on 23 August 1863, the President in a public letter declared:

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...any question that by the law of war, property of both enemies and friends, may be taken when needed? (123)

Lincoln was firm on this point. On 8 July 1864, he vetoed a bill in the Congress which provided for the emancipation


122 Randall, n. 73, p. 181.

of slaves declaring, "I am...unprepared to declare...a constitutional competency in Congress to abolish slavery in the states."

Looking at the effect of the Proclamation after one year, Lincoln noted in his Annual Message to Congress in December 1863, that he still believed in the fact that he was entitled only by virtue of his war powers to free the blacks. He went on to note that in spite of his worst fears, emancipation had proved to be a beneficial policy from the point of view of the war effort. One hundred thousand blacks who were slaves before, had now entered the military service of the Union. "No insurrection, or tendency to violence and cruelty, has marked measures of emancipation and arming the blacks...." The worst of Lincoln's fears were thus not realized and blacks in increasing numbers flocked to join the army, which by Lincoln's edict had become an army of liberation.

Lincoln may have been out of step with the aspiration of the blacks for freedom or with the democratic impulse which ought to have destroyed slavery long before, but he was not out of tune with the grand average of public opinion. While Lincoln never led public opinion, it may be said to his credit that he did not resist it. At the end of 1862, though the war-weary North was all for a rigorous prosecution of the war, there was no ground-swell in favour for emancipation, leave aside black-

white racial equality. Thus, Lincoln carefully proclaimed the freedom of blacks as a measure of military necessity. Such were the misgivings of the antislavery forces in the North with regard to the Emancipation Proclamation itself that in late 1863, a movement began to shape up calling for the passage of a constitutional amendment to incorporate all the measures passed for the benefit of the blacks into the constitutional law of the nation. Side by side, there was also a rise in anti-black sentiments. These were best reflected in the Draft Riots in New York in July 1863. The New York riot was characteristic of many such riots in the North in which the blacks became the target of the mob-frenzy protesting against the rising costs of the war, especially in terms of the human lives it was taking.

Viewing the manner in which the blacks were finally emancipated, it is easy to see the shape of the counter-revolution that took place after 1876. We have sought to look at many of the steps taken through the perceptions, attitudes and actions of the man principally credited with the act of emancipation--Abraham Lincoln. It must be pointed out that for all it was worth, Lincoln's steps were the "moderate" course in the situation. Lincoln never sought to be the "Great Emancipator" and never undertook policy towards that great end. At the end we can only speculate as to what would have been the outcome of a bold and forthright policy of black emancipation and racial equality had it been proclaimed at the very onset of the war. 