

Emancipation

DOCUMENT 12.1

"What to Do with the Slaves When Emancipated," *New York Herald*

1862

Not all Northerners agreed with how President Abraham Lincoln conducted the war. In this March 8, 1862, editorial, for example, the *New York Herald* opposed the emancipation of African American slaves as part of the war effort and tended to support the Democratic Party as opposed to Lincoln's Republican Party.

It will be observed that the policy proposed by the President in his Message to Congress is essentially different from any proposition ever made by the abolitionists. They laughed to scorn the idea of the nation purchasing the freedom of the slaves from their owners, inasmuch as it was the right of the negroes to be free, all laws and constitutions to the contrary notwithstanding. Their policy was a sudden and compulsory emancipation. Mr. Lincoln's [idea is] a gradual and voluntary emancipation, which clearly recognizes the sovereignty of the States over their own domestic institutions, and merely offers them assistance to carry out emancipation if they should deem it desirable.

The policy of the abolitionists would be destructive: that of the President is benign. It looks only to the border slave States; for they alone would be willing to accept the proposition. In the cotton States the slave institution is regarded as entirely superior to that of free labor [where workers can freely move from job to job in pursuit of higher wages]. In the border States there is a difference of opinion on the subject; for the climate, unlike the extreme South, is favorable to the labor of the white man; and wherever that is the case slavery necessarily dies out, because it will no longer pay. It was for that reason alone that all the Northern States got rid of it; and were it not for the fanaticism of the abolitionists creating a spirit of antagonism in the slave States, there would not be a slave in Maryland, Missouri, Virginia or Kentucky to-day. In those States free labor pays better than slave labor, and when the war is ended it is extremely probable that those States will deliberately abolish slavery and accept the aid proposed in Mr. Lincoln's Message.

Now the question is, What is to be done with the slaves when emancipated? It would not do to let them work or not, as they may think proper. If they were willing to work as the white man there would be no slavery now in any Southern State. The proposed change would involve the necessity of transferring from the

master to the State the superintendence of negro labor, and vagrant laws should be passed compelling negroes to work—laws which exist in many parts of Europe in reference to the white population, but infinitely more necessary for blacks, whose idea of paradise is to have nothing to do. The wages should be regulated by law, and be sufficient not only to procure food and clothing, but to enable the negro to lay up something for sickness and old age. On the whole, the negro would be worse off under this system than in servitude; but if the interests of the white men of the border slave States demand it the interests of the negro must be made subordinate, and the system which now gives him protection by law, and a provision for life, must be abolished. But of their own interests in the matter the citizens of the slave States alone are the proper judges, and the people of the free States have nothing whatever to do with the question.

“What to Do with the Slaves When Emancipated,” *New York Herald*, March 8, 1862, Accessible Archives: The Civil War Collection.

PRACTICING Historical Thinking

Identify: What are the writer’s main concerns about emancipation?

Analyze: What is the writer’s attitude toward enslaved African Americans? Explain your response.

Evaluate: How are the writer’s perspectives on slavery different from perspectives of those who lived in Southern states?