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The Nationalism of Abraham Lincoln Revisited

JAMES A. RAWLEY

In 1963, I published an article entitled “The Nationalism of Abraham Lincoln.” The article has experienced an interesting history. It attracted attention from compilers and editors who included it in three anthologies, one (1976) edited by Professors Sidney Fine and Gerald S. Brown of the University of Michigan, another (1970) edited by Don Fehrenbacher of Stanford University, and the third (1970) by William E. Parrish of Westminster College.¹ The Fine and Brown anthology reprinted it under the heading “The Thrust of Abraham Lincoln: Toward the American Nation or Toward the American Dream?” It was paired off with an essay written by Gabor Boritt, then a visitor at the editors’ history department. In introducing the rival interpretations, the editors quoted from my article, while making comments. This introductory matter read:

“Abraham Lincoln is the supreme nationalist in the history of the United States. His greatest service to the nation was not freeing the slaves but preserving the body politic . . . he placed the nation uppermost—above peace, above abolition, above property rights, and even above the Constitution.” Before Lincoln became president, his nationalism had taken form in a firm conviction, which for all its strength was not noisy and was notable for “. . . its avoidance of spread eagle expansionism, of strident Americanism, of cultural chauvinism, and of excessive legalism.” He had defined it on the political side as a system of free government based on the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution; on the cultural side as an emphasis on

1. James A. Rawley, “The Nationalism of Abraham Lincoln,” *Civil War History* 9 (1963): 283–98. Sidney Fine and Gerald S. Brown, eds., *The American Past: Conflicting Interpretations of the Great Issues*, 2 vols., 4th ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1976), 1:533–61. Don E. Fehrenbacher, ed., *The Leadership of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1970), 171–82. William E. Parrish, ed., *The Civil War. A Second American Revolution?* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970), 116–28.

people not the state, and the people's loyalty to the state; and on the economic side as a system based on Henry Clay's American system. In 1862, now president, he declared that the nation had three major components: the territory—"the national homestead": the people—"this great tribunal"; and the laws—fundamental, organic, and statutory. The saving of the union would give "a new birth of freedom" for all mankind and "for man's vast future."

Gabor Boritt squarely took issue with my view and that of a "majority" of historians indicting us as using "poor logic" and "ignoring some of the evidence." Gerald S. Brown, as editor, succinctly stated Boritt's view, which subsequently expanded into a book, *Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream* (1978). Brown wrote,

Gabor Boritt, in a forthcoming book, defines the major thrust of Lincoln's meaning for Americans and for all people as the accomplishment of the American Dream. Boritt states his position clearly: 'Historians generally resolve the seeming ambivalence with good instinct but poor logic, by ignoring some of the evidence. The majority of them take his expressions about the union as his fundamental war aim. Allan Nevins, for example, gave his great history of the Civil War the title *The War for the Union*. If we would see it as Lincoln did, however, it would be more accurate, even if more awkward, to call it the War for the American Dream.' However, Boritt is not dogmatic and does not exclude all other aspects of Lincoln's thought and feeling. Lincoln was a complex and many faceted man; he spoke feelingly of union, democracy, the free constitutional government of the people, but to Lincoln: 'They were identical to or indispensable means to the American Dream.' Professor Boritt has written to me: 'As for my book on him: it clearly recognizes the existence of various elements in Lincoln's thought, yet it also attempts to demonstrate that he had one, all-important, *central idea*. I feel that his devotion to this idea dominated and gave a higher meaning to his political career. This was a devotion to *man's right to rise in life*.' This was the American Dream.

Boritt asserts that the view of Lincoln as "The Great Nationalist" makes him "a man who had a religious faith in the union." His own view of Lincoln as the dreamer of the American Dream, "cherishes him as an American Moses or Christ." To me it seems strange to press Moses and Christ into this economic service. Even more

strange is Boritt's warning, having mentioned Bismarck and Cavour, "Without gainsaying the achievements of the Europeans, we must note that their degenerate twentieth-century descendants in the worship of the nation as an end in itself were Hitler and Mussolini."

This suggested linking of Lincolnian nationalism with those of Italian Fascism and German Naziism so clearly ignores a vast deal of Italian and German history as well as that of the United States that it scarcely merits consideration. Those twentieth-century dictators, exploiting economic distress and national humiliation, also held out economic dreams, one a corporate state economy, the other a clever wedding of nationalism and socialism. Boritt further pursued his argument in a chapter in a book he edited, *The Historian's Lincoln*, published in 1988.²

Boritt in his first piece recognized that Lincoln also spoke of the war in terms more political than economic, as a war for the Union or democracy, and—less frequently—as a war for constitutional government, or justice, of the rights of the people." In considering these Lincolnian emphases he converts all of them into metaphors for the American economic dream. He asserted, "The American Dream, Union, democracy, liberty, all became interchangeable in his utterances."³ How Lincoln performed this sleight of hand, turning all these concepts into the economics of the American Dream, is unclear.

In analyzing Lincoln's outlook Mark E. Neely, Jr., noted that James G. Randall, one of Lincoln's greatest biographers, "was embarrassed by Lincoln's 'favoring of the . . . Bank of the United States' and defending protective tariffs with 'meaningless verbalisms' in his early political career. These faults he attributed 'largely to his attachment to the Whig party.' In later life, Lincoln rose above party and became a statesman," Neely continued. "'Human rights meant more to him than profits,' Randall argued, and his 'philosophy of man and the state did not begin and end with *laissez-faire*.'"⁴

Randall discerned a change in Lincoln's outlook after Lincoln rose above the politics associated with the Whig party. In my opinion such a change did occur, probably with the introduction of the Kansas-Nebraska bill, repealing the Missouri Compromise and

2. Fine and Brown, *American Past*, 534–35, 551–61.

3. *Ibid.*, 552.

4. Mark E. Neely, Jr., *The Abraham Lincoln Encyclopedia* (1982; New York: Da Capo Press, 1984), 256.

opening all the territories to slavery. Virtually absent from political activity since 1849, Lincoln in 1854 re-entered political life, concerned about slavery's threat to the Union.

Daniel Walker Howe observed that slavery as a moral issue and its threat to national unity drove Lincoln "far beyond bourgeois-compulsive virtues of financial honesty and ambition for advancement." Howe also noted that as unintended consequences of the so-called Second American Revolution, urban-industrialism and "'modern' impersonal, bureaucratic corporations came into being." He speculated Lincoln would have been grieved by the "oppression and sordid materialism" of the new economy.⁵

Boritt's argument has greater applicability to Lincoln the Whig when politicians concentrated on economic questions; after the collapse of the Whig party, those lost their prominence. Stephen A. Douglas, debating Lincoln in 1858 said, "Every one of those questions which divide Whigs and Democrats has passed away. . . . What then has taken the place of those questions about which we once differed? The slavery question has now become the leading and controlling issue." Add to that David Donald's conclusion that as president Lincoln paid little attention to economic issues. The dean of Civil War historiographers, Thomas J. Pressly, said the second half of Boritt's book, "discussing the final eleven years in Lincoln's life, is less original than the first half and more vulnerable to criticism."⁶

In 1974, Mark E. Neely, Jr., published an article entitled "Abraham Lincoln's Nationalism Reconsidered." The article opened with the words, "In 1963 historian James Rawley proclaimed Abraham Lincoln 'the supreme nationalist in the history of the United States.'" The article continued by pointing to a number of eminent persons agreeing with the view: Walt Whitman, Alexander H. Stephens, Frederick Douglass, and Nathaniel W. Stephenson. The article later mentioned other errant writers, including Stanley Pargellis and Paul Nagel, but omitted Andrew C. McLaughlin. Daniel Walker Howe and George Will subsequently lent support to my views. Neely observed that "many Lincoln scholars were political historians who judged Lincoln's nationalism; Rawley studied Lincoln's ideas . . . The substance of Rawley's case lay in his assertion that

5. Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 295, 297.

6. Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 9 vols. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953–1955), 3:168–69 (hereafter referred to as *Collected Works*). Thomas J. Pressly, *American Historical Review* 84 (Dec. 1979): 1478.

Lincoln's thought pointed the way to American nationalism because he had 'a conception of the nation as a living organism, capable of evolutionary growth.'"

Drawing on his expertise honed in writing his doctoral dissertation, "The Organic Theory of the State in America, 1838–1918," Neely appraised the assertion that Lincoln's nationalism had an organic nature. He acknowledged that Lincoln departed from the contractual view of nationalism by "violating the Constitution for a higher national end." Neely's conception of organic nationalism appears to require a longer period of growth than spanned in the American colonies and republic. "Lincoln *never* saw the nation as an organism evolved gradually from traditional Anglo-Saxon precedents," he remarked. Dating the nation from 1774 with the Articles of Association or 1776 with the Declaration of Independence, as Lincoln variously said, did not meet Neely's test for the nation to be a product of steady habit and custom, evolving gradually from traditional Anglo-Saxon precedents.⁷

Neely's dismissal of the organic character of Lincoln's nationalism does not square with the judgments of Andrew C. McLaughlin, Daniel Walker Howe, Garry Wills, and this writer. McLaughlin wrote, "The organic character of the United States can be sustained on an interpretation of acts, facts and forces of the Revolutionary period, 1760–1790." The ordinary mode adopted by advocates of the organic idea, he continued, "was to deny that the states were ever sovereign and to insist, as Lincoln did, that the Union was older than the states."⁸

Howe declared that "Lincoln was far from alone in seeing the war as a process of atonement for sin, out of which the nation would emerge strengthened and purged. . . . The organic conception of national community and the religious sense of history, which had characterized the old Whigs, made such a view plausible." Howe approved Wills' description of "Lincoln's gradualist and organicist approach to implementing the ideals of the Declaration."⁹

Lincoln, I believe, held an organic view of nationalism, and he contributed to its growth. In his First Inaugural Address, he said, "The Union is much older than the Constitution. It was formed in fact by the Articles of Association in 1774. It was matured and con-

7. *Lincoln Herald* 76 (Spring 1974): 12–28. Quotes on 12, 13, 17.

8. Andrew C. McLaughlin, "Social Compact and Constitutional Construction," *American Historical Review* 5 (Apr. 1900): 487–88.

9. Howe, *Political Culture*, 295. Garry Wills, *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), xiv–xxiv.

tinued by the Declaration of Independence in 1776. It was further matured, and the faith of all the then thirteen States expressly pledged and engaged that it should be perpetual, by the Articles of Confederation in 1778. And, finally, in 1787, one of the declared objects for ordaining and establishing the Constitution was “to form a more perfect union.”

In memorable language at Gettysburg he spoke of the nation having fathers, conception, birth, facing the threat of death, and the need for “a new birth of freedom”—all characteristics of an organism. During the war he saw the presidency not inhibited by a contractual view of the nation, but as a living thing possessing flexibility. He suspended the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus, and persisted in suspension despite the opinion of R. B. Taney, chief justice of the United States Supreme Court (sitting as a circuit judge), that Lincoln had usurped the power to suspend. Despite the unwillingness of Congress to accord him the power, he extended the suspension over all the United States and imposed martial law over disloyal persons. The Supreme Court after the war declared he had violated the Constitution.

Similarly Lincoln enlarged national power by taking into his own hands reconstruction of the nation, and did not live to see the Supreme Court rule that he had violated the Constitution. He saw a national executive whose power could expand and contract during wartime; these are organic traits. On December 5, 1864, he assured a Congress often restless with his flexible view of the executive authority that, “The Executive power itself would be greatly diminished by the cessation of actual war.”

By 1864, he was endeavoring to make sure that the national power would grow, not alone by waging a war that he had begun with executive proclamation, but also by expanding the Constitution. He pushed hard to secure congressional passage of a resolution to add to the Constitution the thirteenth amendment abolishing slavery. When a resolution to amend was faltering in Congress, he asked the chairman of the Republican National Committee—Senator Edwin D. Morgan of New York—to endorse and commit the party to the amendment at the convention. Morgan did so, to the accompaniment of resounding applause. When the editor of the *New York Independent* mentioned this to the president, he responded, “It was I who suggested to Mr. Morgan that he should put that idea into his opening speech.”¹⁰

10. John G. Nicolay and John Hay, *Abraham Lincoln: A History*, 10 vols. (New York: Century Co., 1909), 10:79.

The House failed to pass the resolution, and following his re-election, Lincoln, on December 5, exhorted the House to approve it to the end of "maintenance of the Union." In ways not fully known, which included using his patronage power, Lincoln, together with Secretary of State William H. Seward, labored to expand the national government, giving freedom to slaves and authority to Congress to enforce it.

In his article on Nationalism in his invaluable *Lincoln Encyclopedia*, Neely quoted President-elect Lincoln's remark in Independence Hall, on George Washington's birthday, 1861: "what great principle or idea . . . kept this Confederacy so long together. It was . . . something in that Declaration giving liberty, not alone to the people of this country, but hope to the world for all future time." Neely concluded, Lincoln "seemed to value liberty more than mere national sovereignty."¹¹ But Lincoln well knew that liberty could not exist without government. In his First Inaugural Address he observed that the "central idea of secession, is the essence of anarchy." The liberty he praised to his audience in the cradle of liberty was contained in the American nation, a whole government, undivided by secession, prescribed in the Declaration and secured in the constitution.

Years earlier, in 1856, Lincoln saw a different central idea. He quoted Daniel Webster having said, "Not Union without liberty, nor liberty without Union; but Union and liberty, now and forever, one and inseparable." Continuing, Lincoln identified the "central idea" at the beginning of the government as "the equality of men." Responding to serenaders in 1863, Lincoln referred to the "gigantic Rebellion, at the bottom of which is an effort to overthrow the principle that all men are created equal." In 1864, speaking to the 148th Ohio Regiment, which had called on him at the White House, he gave a different emphasis. He combined the two concepts. "But this government must be preserved in spite of the acts of any man or set of men. It is worth your every effort. Nowhere in the world is presented a government of so much liberty and equality."¹² Lincoln's invocation of principles enunciated in the Declaration of Independence seemed to have a selective quality.

Lincoln's references to the Declaration have a singular history. In the *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, edited by Roy P. Basler, Lincoln first mentioned the Declaration in 1838 and not again until 1854. The inflammatory Kansas-Nebraska Act prompted him to

11. Neely, "Nationalism," 216.

12. *Collected Works*, 4:268, 2:383, 2:385, 7:528.

mention the Declaration ten times in 1854. In the next three years he mentioned it only seven times, but in 1858 seventy times, principally in his debates with Stephen A. Douglas. The pattern continues with eleven references in the next year, six in the following year, eight in the first year of his presidency, and one in his second year. A search of his works discloses no reference to the Declaration after 1862, a puzzling abandonment of direct citation. This was compensated for, in some degree, by his mention of liberty and equality in those last years.¹³

At the same time, in the years from 1854 he was increasingly employing the word *nation* in place of *Union*. We have already seen that he used the word *Confederacy* in his speech in Philadelphia. William B. Hesseltine, endeavoring to illustrate Lincoln's "evolving concept of the nation," noted that in his First Inaugural Address Lincoln repeatedly used the time-honored word *Union*, but never the word *nation*.¹⁴ In his message to the special session in July 1861 he made numerous references to the *Union* and several to the *Federal Union*. Again in his first annual message he frequently referred to the *Union*, and sometimes to the *Federal Union*, the *National Union*, and in a single paragraph three times used the word *nation*. In August 1862 he employed the word *Union* many times to describe his aim, "My paramount object is to save the *Union* and not either to save or destroy slavery." In his brief address at Gettysburg the word *nation* conspicuously appeared: "a new nation," "any nation so conceived and dedicated," "that that nation might live," "and this nation shall have a new birth of freedom." The language of his Second Inaugural Address suggests a strong preference for the word *nation*. He used the word *Union* to refer to events that had taken place in 1861. Now in 1865 the public was focused upon the great contest absorbing the attention of the nation, and he urged Americans "to bind up the nation's wounds." He never abandoned the word *Union*, but the word *nation* had come to the fore in his vocabulary. It remains for another student more fully to explain why the words *Declaration of Independence* declined in his usage and the word *nation* increased.¹⁵

13. Analysis of *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*. Abraham Lincoln Association website, www.alincolnassoc.com.

14. William B. Hesseltine, *Lincoln's Plan of Reconstruction* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1967), 35–36.

15. Analysis of *Collected Works*, www.alincolnassoc.com.

In his brilliant study *The Presidency of Abraham Lincoln*, Phillip S. Paludan, acknowledging Lincoln's goal of saving the Union, combined it with another. Paludan stated, "the major premise of this book: freeing the slaves and saving the Union were linked as one goal, not two optional goals."¹⁶

Where does that one goal begin? Evidence abounds that Lincoln separated the two goals. It is to be remembered that when he took office on March 4, 1861, the nation had been sundered, seven states having seceded and formed the Confederate States of America. Faced with a divided nation, in his inaugural address he declared he had no objection to a proposed amendment "to the effect that the federal government, shall never interfere with the domestic institutions of the States, including that of persons held to service."

Six weeks later in calling forth the militia, he said, "I appeal to all loyal citizens to favor, facilitate and aid this effort to maintain the honor, the integrity, and the existence of our National Union, and the perpetuity of popular government; and to redress wrongs already long enough endured."

Not three weeks later he called for volunteers, giving as his reason, "Whereas existing exigencies demand immediate and adequate measures for the protection of the National Constitution and the preservation of the National Union."¹⁷

In welcoming the Minister Plenipotentiary from the Republic of the Granadian Confederacy, he described "the first purpose of government everywhere—the maintenance of national independence." Of the republican system of government, he said, "It is my confident hope and belief that this system will be found, after sufficient trials, to be better adapted everywhere than any other to other great interests of human society—namely, the preservation of peace, order, and national prosperity."¹⁸

Delivering his message to the special session he had convened on the Fourth of July 1861, he referred to the Confederates' firing on Fort Sumter: "In this act, discarding all else, they have forced upon the country, the distinct issue: 'Immediate dissolution or blood.' . . . And this issue embraces more than the fate of these United States. It presents to the whole family of man the question

16. Phillip S. Paludan, *The Presidency of Abraham Lincoln* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994), xiv–xv.

17. *Collected Works*, 4:270, 353.

18. *Ibid.*, 4:393. I am indebted to Mark E. Neely, Jr., for calling this statement and that of footnote 22 to my attention.

of whether a constitutional republic or a democracy—a government of the people, by the same people—can, or cannot, maintain its territorial integrity, against its own domestic foes. . . . This is essentially a People’s contest. On the side of the Union, it is a struggle for maintaining in the world, that form, and substance of government whose leading object is, to elevate the condition of men—to lift artificial weights from all shoulders—to clear the paths of laudable pursuit for all—to afford all, an unfettered start, and a fair chance, in the race of life. Yielding to partial, and temporary, departures from necessity, this is the leading object of the Government for whose existence we contend.” He accompanied these declarations of the war’s purpose with a request for at least four hundred thousand men “for making this contest a short and decisive one.”¹⁹ Surely he did not expect a “short and decisive” war to result in emancipation.

Within months Lincoln faced the matter of emancipation. General John C. Frémont proclaimed free the slaves of all persons in Missouri who had “taken an active part with their (loyal citizens’) enemies in the field.” Lincoln countermanded that provision, and the episode provoked great controversy. Orville H. Browning, United States senator from Illinois and a close friend of the President, wrote Lincoln objecting to the countermanding. In reply, the President noted the popularity of the proclamation of freedom.

But I cannot assume this reckless position; nor allow others to assume it on my responsibility. You speak of it as being the only means of *saving* the government. On the contrary it is itself the surrender of the government. Can it be pretended that it is any longer the government of the U. S.—any government of Constitution and laws,—wherein a General or a President, may make permanent rules of property by proclamation?

I do not say Congress might not with propriety pass a law, on the point, just such as General Fremont proclaimed. I do not say I might not, as a member of Congress, vote for it. What I object to, is, that I as President, shall expressly or impliedly seize and exercise the permanent functions of government.²⁰

Two and a half months after his disclaimer of presidential power to free slaves by proclamation, Lincoln addressed Congress on the

19. *Ibid.*, 4:426, 438, 431.

20. *Ibid.*, 4:531–32.

matter of slavery and the Union. He saw the war as “an attempt to divide and destroy the Union,” a factious division, “sure, sooner or later, to invoke foreign intervention.” Continuing, he declared “the insurrection is largely, if not exclusively, a war upon the first principle of popular government.” He pointed to public documents in the Confederacy advocating abridging the right of suffrage, denying to the people the right to participate in the election of public officers, and asserting “that large control of the people in government, is the source of all political evil” and hinting of monarchy. At some length he pointed out the consequences of the loss of the present system, which “gives hope to all, and consequent energy, and progress, and improvement of condition to all.”

He then told Congress, “In considering the policy to be adopted for suppressing the insurrection, I have been anxious and careful that the inevitable conflict for this purpose shall not degenerate into a violent and remorseless revolutionary struggle. I have, therefore, in every case, thought it proper to keep the integrity of the Union prominent as the primary object of the contest on our part, leaving all questions which are not of vital military importance to the . . . legislature. . . . The Union must be preserved,” he insisted.

Three months later he sent to Congress a message recommending a policy looking to gradual, federally compensated emancipation by states. He explained his objective, quoting the annual message’s words, “The Union must be preserved; and hence all indispensable means must be employed.” He went on, “War has been made, and continues to be, an indispensable means to this end.” He described the suggested policy, as one means, but not indispensable. A practical re-acknowledgement of the national authority would render the war unnecessary, and it would at once cease—without emancipation.²¹

On April 24, 1862, welcoming the arrival of a minister from San Salvador, Lincoln remarked, “Republicanism is demonstrating its adaptation to the highest interests of society—the preservation of the State itself against the violence of faction. . . . Let the American States, therefore, draw closer together and animate and reassure each other, and thus prove to the world that, although we have inherited some of the errors of ancient systems, we are nevertheless capable of completing and establishing the new one which we

21. *Ibid.*, 5:36, 51, 52, 48–49 for annual message; 144–46 for state emancipation message.

have now chosen. On the result largely depends the progress, civilization, and happiness of mankind," he concluded.²²

Late in July, Lincoln received a letter from a conservative Louisiana loyalist, Thomas J. Durant. Durant complained that the presence of the Union army in Louisiana disturbed the relation between master and slave, suspending constitutional guarantees on the ground of military necessity. Lincoln forthrightly replied, "The truth is, that what is done, and omitted, about slaves, is done and omitted on the same military necessity."²³

In an oft-quoted exchange with Horace Greeley, editor of the most influential Northern newspaper, *The New York Tribune*, Lincoln responded to Greeley's pretentious editorial entitled "The Prayer of Twenty Millions," expressing disappointment with the policy the President seemed to be following. Lincoln declared, "I would save the Union. . . . My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is *not* either to save or destroy slavery."²⁴

In telling Greeley and the nation, in a letter he was sure would be published, that his policy was to save the Union, he had not ruled out freeing slaves, if that would help save the Union. He had in fact drafted an emancipation proclamation on July 2, following repeated failures to secure support for his compensated emancipation policy. On September 22, exactly one year after his disclaimer of power to do so, he issued the most famous proclamation in United States history. Claiming power as president and commander-in-chief, he proclaimed "that hereafter, as heretofore, the war will be prosecuted for the object of practically restoring the constitutional relation between the United States, and each of the states . . . in which that relation is, or may be suspended, or disturbed."

The preliminary Emancipation Proclamation declared that on the first of January 1863 slaves of states or parts of states then in rebellion would be free. But at the same time it said that states which on that day were "in good faith represented in the Congress," by persons chosen by a majority of qualified voters, should not be considered in rebellion, and therefore be exempted from emancipation. That is not the language of a man presumed to have combined the goals of reunion and emancipation in a single aim. The Union, he was saying, took precedence over emancipation."²⁵

22. *Ibid.*, 5:198.

23. *Ibid.*, 5:344–46.

24. *Ibid.*, 5:388–89.

25. *Ibid.*, 5:433–36.

In his second annual message, Lincoln argued in geographical terms for the maintenance of the Union. "There is no line, straight or crooked, suitable for a national boundary, upon which do divide. . . . Our national strife springs . . . not from the land we inhabit. . . . Our strife pertains to ourselves . . . and it can, without convulsion, be hushed forever. . . ." From this opening he proceeded to recommend amendments to the Constitution, providing, first, compensated emancipation to be reached by January 1, 1900, second, emancipation for "all slaves who shall have enjoyed actual freedom by the chances of the war," and, third, an appropriation by Congress "for colonizing free colored persons, with their own consent. . . ."

For persons alarmed by the cost of emancipation, he compared its cost with the cost of continuing the war. "And if, with less money, or money more easily paid, we can preserve the benefits of the Union by this means, than we can by the war alone, is it not also economical to do it?" Congress declined to approve his plan "for restoring and preserving the national authority throughout the Union."

By January 1 no rebel state had returned to the Union. Lincoln accordingly proclaimed freedom for slaves in those parts of the Union in rebellion "as a fit and necessary war measure. . . ." ²⁶

Throughout 1863, as in a drumbeat, Lincoln maintained that his purpose was to restore the Union. Writing to General John A. McClernand, who had forwarded a letter saying high-ranking Confederate officers "desire the restoration of peace," the President replied, "I never did ask more, nor ever was willing to accept less, than for all the States, and the people thereof, to take and hold their places, and their rights, in the Union, under the Constitution of the United States." ²⁷

A little more than a week later, responding to an address and resolutions from the workingmen of Manchester, England, Lincoln said, "When I came, on the fourth day of March, 1861, through a free and constitutional election, to preside in the government of the United States, the country was found at the verge of civil war. Whatever might have been the cause, or whosoever the fault, one duty paramount to all others was before me, namely, to maintain and preserve the Constitution and the integrity of the federal republic. A conscientious purpose to perform this duty is a key to all

26. *Ibid.*, 5:528–30, 6:29.

27. *Ibid.*, 6:48–49.

measures of administration which have been, and to all which will hereafter be pursued."²⁸

Following the New York City draft riots, Governor Horatio Seymour of New York wrote Lincoln a long letter asking that the draft be suspended and its constitutionality be judged by the courts before the draft law was again executed. Lincoln in response both declined to suspend the draft (though he later reduced the state's quota) and to wait until the United States Supreme Court determined the law's constitutionality. He closed with an explanation: "My purpose is to be, in my action, just and constitutional; and yet practical, in performing the important duty, with which I am charged, of maintaining the unity, and the free principles of our common country."²⁹

We shall return to the Gettysburg Address with its eloquent statement of the war's purpose. Through 1864 Lincoln continued to voice the war's primary purpose. Speaking in June at the Great Central Sanitary Fair in Philadelphia, where three years earlier he had seen the Union's central idea to be liberty, he now declared, "This war has taken three years; it was begun or accepted upon the line of restoring the national authority over the whole national domain. . . ."³⁰

Writing in August to a Wisconsin editor and War Democrat who was searching for a "tenable ground on which we War Democrats may stand," Lincoln penned a reply that concluded, "If Jefferson Davis wishes, for himself, or for the benefit of his friends at the North, to know what I would do if he were to offer peace and re-union, saying nothing about slavery, let him try me."³¹

It was on the last day of August when Lincoln told the soldiers of the 148th Ohio Regiment, "this government must be preserved. . . . Nowhere in the world is presented a government of so much liberty and equality."³²

In a draft letter to Isaac Schermerhorn, who asked him to attend a Union Mass Meeting in Buffalo, New York, on September 12 Lincoln asserted, ". . . that the administration accepted the war . . . for the sole avowed object of preserving our Union; and it is not true

28. *Ibid.*, 6:63–64.

29. *Ibid.*, 6:369–70.

30. *Ibid.*, 7:395.

31. *Ibid.*, 7:501.

32. *Ibid.*, 7:528.

that it has since been, or will be, prosecuted by this administration, for any other object. In declaring this, I only declare what I can know, and do know to be true, and what no other man can know to be false." Lincoln chose not to send the letter, saying it was not customary for an officeholder who was a candidate for reelection to write a general letter to a political meeting.³³

In his last annual message on December 6, 1864, Lincoln, advertising to his party's success in the November election, urged Congress to pass the thirteenth amendment abolishing slavery throughout the United States. Saying the election results were the voice of the people speaking for a common end, he declared, "In this case the common end is the maintenance of the Union."³⁴

When did Lincoln determine it was necessary to amend the Constitution to prohibit slavery throughout the whole nation? Replying to the committee notifying him of his re-nomination, Lincoln on June 9, 1864, said, "When the people in revolt, with a hundred days of explicit notice, that they could, within those days, resume their allegiance, without the overthrow of their institution, and that they could not so resume it afterwards, elected to stand out, such an amendment of the Constitution as is now proposed, became a fitting, and necessary conclusion to the final success of the Union cause." He was saying that not until January 1, 1863, did the need for national abolition arise.³⁵

After the thirteenth amendment had labored through the House of Representatives, Lincoln told serenaders, "He wished the reunion of all the States perfected and so effected as to remove all causes of disturbance in the future; and to attain this end it was necessary that the original disturbing cause should, if possible, be rooted out." He acknowledged his Emancipation Proclamation fell short of what the amendment would accomplish. His proclamation was of doubtful legality; it did not apply to all slaves. "But this amendment is a King's cure for all the evils." Paludan's combining the aims of reunion and emancipation, after failure of reunion with slavery, had at last come to pass.³⁶

In all the foregoing assertions Lincoln plainly said his purpose was to save the Union.

33. *Ibid.*, 7:546; 8:1-2.

34. *Ibid.*, 8:149.

35. *Ibid.*, 7:380.

36. *Ibid.*, 8:254-55.

Lincoln's nationalism, to sum up, did not mean reverence for the state or for what is sometimes called stateism. Nor was it restricted to one idea—an economic dream, or one concept—liberty, or requiring emancipation—until winning the war pressed it upon him.

His nationalism was a cluster of ideas, of equality, liberty, both civil and religious, popular government defined by the Constitution, and inspired by the Declaration of Independence. It rested upon widespread suffrage, majority rule, disallowance of secession, but allowance for the right to change the Constitution as in reversal of the Dred Scott decision and addition of the thirteenth amendment, "Free speech and discussion and immunity from whip and tar and feathers," clearing "the paths of laudable pursuit for all," and a guarantee to each state of a republican form of government. Majority rule and constitutional change were vehicles for growth. To sustain such ends the integrity of the nation must be preserved. The argument for the view that preserving the nation was his paramount purpose is piled high with evidence. Lincoln distilled much of his outlook in his most memorable speech given at Gettysburg. In words familiar to every school child, he spoke not of a union but of a nation; used organic language—fathers, conceived, endure, perish; embraced the concepts of liberty and equality; emphasized democracy—government of the people, by the people, for the people; and recognized the significance of popular government for the entire earth.

The nation he left before dying in its cause had grown stronger, more modern with his acquiescence to the economic measures enacted by the Civil War congress, more fully developed in its functions. Secession had been slain; state rights diminished; four million Americans freed from slavery, an unintended aim at the war's start; the Constitution expanded by amendment and Congress given to power to enforce it; and a demonstration made that the scheme of government held an unexpected flexibility and durability.