



Lincoln Lore

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Edouard Laboulaye On the Presidential Election of 1864

Editor's Note: Edouard Lefebvre de Laboulaye (1811-1883), a French journalist and politician, was considered by the Union Congressional Committee in the election year of 1864 to be a "great friend of America." Laboulaye strongly urged the re-election of Abraham Lincoln to the presidency, and his paper written in the French language was received by the American Consul at Paris, who in turn sent it to the United States Department of State. The paper was translated into English and was widely circulated by the Union Congressional Committee (Republican Party) in the Presidential Campaign of 1864.

The key plank of the Democratic platform in 1864, upon which General George B. McClellan was supposed to oppose Lincoln, read in part ". . . after four years of failure to restore the Union by experiment of war . . . justice, humanity, liberty, and the public welfare demand that immediate efforts be made for a cessation of hostilities with a view to an ultimate convention of the states, or other peaceable means, to the end that at the earliest practicable moment peace may be restored on the basis of the Federal Union of the States." It was upon this plank that Laboulaye launched his bitter attack.

Throughout the political campaign the issues were "Union and disunion," "freedom and slavery" and "war and peace." The Republican Party appeared to the politician and voter to have a closer affinity for the Union than the Democratic Party, and consequently adopted the official name of "National Union Party" and used it throughout the campaign. We, of course, know the results. Lincoln received 234 electoral votes to McClellan's 21. Lincoln's electors received about 55 percent of the popular vote or approximately four hundred thousand more than his opponent.

Those who read Professor Laboulaye's paper written in the heat of the presidential campaign will no doubt realize that in 1864 the voter was confronted with as serious and momentous problems as confronts the voter of 1964. However, the reader may conclude that while all is not yet well with our nation, we have come a long way in the last one hundred years.

R. G. M.

This pamphlet is not listed in Monaghan's bibliography.

(TRANSLATION)

The Election of the President of the United States

"In the life of Nations, there are supreme moments in which the choice made is decisive of the future; the greatness and the freedom of the People are at stake; an instant of weakness, all is lost; an instant of energy, a last effort, and all is saved.

"It is in one of these crises that the United States are now involved. The election of President may assure the triumph or the ruin of the North, it will decide the question of Union or Separation. According to the name which shall come forth from the popular urn, America may regain peace and become the model for free countries, or may fall into that incurable anarchy which has made the Spanish Republic the prey of miserable despots, the laughing stock and jest of Europe.

"Two names are presented: that of Abraham Lincoln, and that of McClellan. But in this case names are of little importance. Mr. Lincoln, Mr. McClellan are two banners which represent the opposing parties, and it is on the coming in of one of these parties that the loss or the safety of the Union depends. Let us set the men aside. Their ability or their past mistakes will not weigh in the balance; the question in agitation is quite another thing from the success of a personal ambition. For the Union, for America, it is a question of Life or Death.

"Mr. Lincoln represents a policy the most compact. It is comprised in two words: *Maintenance of the Union, the abolition of slavery*, all the rest is merely accessory, and can easily be modified according to circumstances. Mr. McClellan protests his devotion to the Union, his desire to re-establish concord and

peace; but these are general phrases which conceal the real thought of the party. At bottom, the policy of McClellan is not less defined than that of his rival. To him who knows how to construe the device on his banner, it means — *Re-establishment of Union such as may be, Slavery continuing a domestic question*, that is slavery continuing. To end a bloody strife and restore peace by replastering at whatever cost the old edifice of the Union, such are the promises of the General; they are not dazzling; one must reckon upon the miseries of prolonged war; on the sufferings of trade; on the weariness of men's spirits, to venture to propose to the American People conditions so depressing. They would not have offered two years ago. But even these promises moderate as they may be, the General, become President, will not be able to fulfill.

"The force of events will be more powerful than the dream of a candidate. Without the gift of prophe-



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

President Lincoln in his race against General George B. McClellan, who headed up the Democratic ticket in 1864, carried every state in the Union except Delaware, New Jersey and Kentucky.

cy it may be affirmed that Mr. McClellan will not control the freshet he desires to let loose. The success of the General is the upholding of Slavery; and the upholding of Slavery is the abdication of the North and the triumph of the South. There is the danger that menaces the Union. For all friends of America and freedom, it is a duty to point this out.

"Why does the South secede? It is on a question of tariffs — a difference of race or of creed? No; all these fine pretences have been imagined to blind Europe, and those who invented them have been the first to laugh at our credulity.

"During thirty years or more the South has ruled the Union. It is the policy of the South that has been the policy of the United States; there have been no Presidents but those who have had the support of the South. How is it that the South has been able to wield this preponderant influence? The answer is easy. The South has strengthened itself through one of the parties existing at the North. It has adopted the men on condition these men would become the auxiliaries and accomplices of its desires and its interests; never was a bargain more faithfully kept. That party always ready to serve a sectional policy, is that which styles itself democratic, in opposition to the republican party — it is that which now puts forward General McClellan; what it desires is not difficult of divination; its past answers for its future.

"Why did the South seek to rule the Union? For a single reason: to maintain Slavery. It needed political domination in order to secure its internal despotism. It needed to reign at Washington in order to prevent a ray of freedom from penetrating the cabin of the negro. Each year the Union was extended; each year some new free State came to add a star without a stain to the federal banner; the South, with its slaves, could only follow with halting step the triumphal march of freedom, and nevertheless it must at any cost maintain the political equality of Slavery; another free State, and the scales were turned. The success of freedom was the overthrow of the South.

"Such is the policy the South has followed with a tenacity worthy of a better cause. In Europe it is the fashion, in good society, to admire the southern gentlemen, and have a moderate estimation of the northern people. Europe is full of ignorant marquises who disdain hands browned and hardened by labor. The idleness of a nobleman is a noble thing, and what finer noblemen than the rich planters of the South? Brave, rash, intractable on a point of honor, rich, hospitable, profuse; is more wanting to enchant the fine people? The reverse of the medal, no one cares to see with good reason, for it is the ugliest and saddest in the world, the taking advantage of labor by idleness, of weakness by force, of wretchedness by riches. The Gospels are dishonored, humanity trampled under foot, but what matters humanity and the Gospels? In face of men so bold, and women of such fashion never dream that all that elegance has been paid for by the sweat and blood of a wretched negro basely down-trodden.

"On the day when the people of the North and West seriously undertook their duty as men, as citizens, as christians, the day when the cup of infamy overflowed, when there was no longer willingness to act as the jailer and servitor of the South — on that day, the South with its chivalric audacity, proudly raised the banner of civil war; it had made game of the Union and the Constitution as a planter makes game of his slaves or his dogs. Everything is allowable to noblemen; there are no duties, no native country for the chivalry. What can be asked from a man who heroically kills his fellow citizens or who dies bravely on a battle field? There is no crime so great that temerity does not grant it amnesty.

"To this culpable attack the North replied by sending its sons to defend the threatened fatherland. It is also the fashion in Europe to pretend that the re-

cruits of the northern armies are mercenaries. There may now be a certain number of foreigners in them. I do not deny it, but that the North has not given its best and purest blood to the war is one of those ingenious fictions with which our simplicity is played upon. At Boston, at New York, at Philadelphia there is not a workshop nor a counting house without its vacant places, there is scarcely a family not in mourning. In France in 1792, not more patriotism was shown, nor more courage, more self-devotion.

"The war was entered upon with this war cry only: *To maintain the Union, to save the country.* But by degrees as the contest went on, and all the strength of the resistance of the power of the South began to be felt, eyes were opened. The North had not provoked war; the North had not violated the Constitution, the North had not menaced the South, either in its liberty, or its privileges, or in its interests, the right to meddle with slavery had never been thought of, all had recoiled from the enormity of the question; but when once the struggle was commenced, it was asked what causes have brought about the fratricide war, which costs the North so much blood, so many sorrows, such sacrifices — one word replies to all this: it is slavery; it is the sum of all infamies as the pious Wesley justly said, which has induced the South to commit the greatest of crimes. To the profit of its egotism and its ambition the South has destroyed without pity the work of Washington, and raised its hands against the country.

"The evil once recognized, the remedy was sought for. Mr. Lincoln has been the interpreter of the national will, when to the upholding of the Union as the subject of the war he added the abolition of slavery. The two things hold together so long as there shall be a slave on the soil of free America. The Union will be merely one word — things will be ever on the eve of a new explosion.

"What is it that this word Union signifies? Is it merely the juxta-position on the same territory of men separated in feeling, in interests, in opinions? Is it, on the contrary, a society of men holding the same faith, and the same will? To put the question is to solve it. Why does the resident of Maine or Connecticut feel himself to be the fellow-countryman and friend of the planter who dwells on the border of Lake Superior, or on the shores of the Pacific? It is because both hold the same faith and the same love, and both acknowledge liberty only. But can it be that the Yankee, industrious, economical, jealous of the common equality, will ever agree with the planter who lives by domination, who despises industry, and who acknowledges only the law of his power and his passions? It is impossible. Between the democracy of labor and aristocracy of idleness, between a free society and a slave society there is an abyss that nothing can bridge. The first, the sole condition upon which the Union can be re-established in a durable manner, is that Slavery must disappear, and that liberty may give to all the like interests, the like duties, the same faith, and the same country.

"Such is the policy that sustains Mr. Lincoln; it is the only rational one, because it is the only just one. It is not the North that provoked the strife. For more than thirty years it has bowed before the privileges of the South. Through respect for the Constitution, it has borne with everything, and now that those privileges have given birth to civil war, the North would be insane if it did not avail, even of its calamity, to uproot and abolish slavery, and to destroy, with the same blow, aristocracy by the establishing of liberty.

"Let not the meaning of my words be mistaken. I do not mean to assail the men of the South, it is that fatal institution which has blinded and destroyed them. I do not approve all the measures adopted at the North. I blame confiscation, which does not belong to our times. I do not like that people should talk of transforming into Territories States which seek to come back into the Union; I have no liking for violence, or for inequality. Treat considerately men and property — have

regard for interests, receive with open arms the prodigal son who returns to the parental home, offer to every wanderer a sincere amnesty, there is nothing better; religion, humanity, self-interest well understood demand this; but no quarter to slavery. If you do not kill it, it will kill you.

"This policy, it will be said, is what the North has sought to follow — it has not succeeded. The country is exhausted by four years of bloodshed and wretchedness; has any progress been made since the beginning of these events? I avow it, this policy has not succeeded from the beginning; but, except on the stage, where have we seen injustice punished in an hour, or virtue rewarded as soon as it has suffered? It is otherwise in the affairs of the world. To extirpate a rooted injustice, to expel from society exclusive privilege and violence, requires continued effort and painful sacrifices. Such is the expiation which God inflicts on those who, through weakness, have long tampered with wrong; he sometimes compels the offspring to suffer for the crimes which their ancestors should have strangled at their outset.

"If the North has not yet brought the war to a close, is it true that it has made no progress? Maryland, Upper Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, Missouri, are not these restored to the Union? Is it not master of Louisiana, Arkansas, the stream of the Mississippi? Is it nothing that the harbor of Mobile has been taken? Is the capture of Atlanta nothing? Is it nothing that Grant's army hangs on Lee's flanks, holding him stationary about Richmond? Notwithstanding the valor of its soldiery, the energy and skill of its Generals, the South is gasping; it has no longer an army of reserve; a victory will not save it; another campaign may bring matters to a close. All its expectations have been destroyed. It had counted upon the wants of Europe, on the selfishness of the manufacturers, on the jealousies of England. To complete the work it had begun, to tear the country to pieces, it needed help from abroad, but that failed it. King Cotton was to place at the feet of the South, Europe needy and interested. King Cotton has been dethroned, to the advantage of India and Egypt. The cause of the humble, the weak, the needy has carried the day against the political combinations of European Cabinets. England would perhaps be gratified by the dismemberance of America, which would deliver her from the only rivalry she fears, would restore to her the dominion of the seas, and would give the South to her as a colony and as a *tete du pont*, but England is the country of Wilberforce; she has not dared to wage war for the maintenance of slavery; and what England has not dared to do, no other will do. From the beginning, I announced to the South that it could never surmount the moral reprobation of Europe, and that not a single prince would venture to brave its opinion. I will go farther now, and will add that each day brings more clearly to light the interest which all the powers of Europe, one alone excepted, have in the maintenance of the Union. The traditions of 1781 are reawakened, and, with exception of some subtle and chimeric policies, no man in France questions that the true interest of the country is to maintain the policy of Louis XVI and Napoleon. Union is the first necessity of America; but, it is also one of the greatest interests of France. The freedom of the seas is its value; and without the freedom of the seas, the independence of France, and that of Europe, are equally endangered.

"Abandoned by Europe, encircled and by degrees subdued by the North, the South is condemned to self-exhaustion; it must give way; and the moment cannot be far distant. Let the North persist in the policy pursued by Mr. Lincoln, more easy than all the rest, he maintains at all hazards these two conditions. *Re-establishment of the Union, abandonment of Slavery.* The South must bow to necessity. Whatever the courage of an army, or a people, a time arrives when hopeless resistance is nothing but sanguinary folly. The Generals and the soldiery of the South have fought

with an obstinacy and bravery to which their adversaries are the first to do justice. But they have been deceived, their cause is a bad one, and they cannot triumph. Lee, Beauregard have done enough for the honor of the flag. It will soon be time for them to think of that which humanity and their country demands. But there is for the South a last chance of salvation: it is that which is offered by General McClellan and his party; it is a transaction the cost of which will be borne by the wretched negro.

"This transaction is disguised under fine phrases, for to dare to state it plainly would cause men to shrink from it. It is called, to *provide for the security, in the future, of the Constitutional rights of each State.* Admirable mouthing for those who like to pay off in fine words! In plain language it means to say that the North renounces having anything to do with Slavery; and that Slavery shall be maintained at the South as long as it shall please the South to maintain it. It is to the privileged few that General McClellan remits the care of abolishing the privilege: we may be well assured the South will not abuse this permission. The South has made war to maintain the supremacy of the pro-slavery policy, the slave is delivered up to it to make peace. The North resigns itself to this. For the love of peace it accepts complicity in this infamy, which for four years it has rejected. Thus you have in all its nakedness what the democratic party call a transaction.

"Perhaps at the North there may be people who, tired of the war, and caring very little about the miseries of Slavery, willingly yield to this arrangement. But I fear not to say they greatly deceive themselves; this arrangement is impracticable. To bargain about interests is most easy, and often most just, but we cannot bargain about right and wrong, between Slavery and Freedom. To sacrifice four millions of human beings to a political interest, even for the safety of the moment, is a crime, and like all crimes, is a blunder and a danger.

"Let us suppose that General McClellan is elected President. What will he do? He will propose an armistice to the South; commissioners will be appointed, perhaps a convention, to regulate the transaction wished for. But we know beforehand what conditions the North proposes. Slavery is abandoned to the South, as an institution which concerns it only; all that is asked of the rebels is to be pleased to come back into the Union. What is this transaction for the North? It is the loss of four years of war—of ten thousand millions of disbursement; the idle sacrifice of blood poured out on twenty battle-fields. The South will have insanely violated the Constitution, ruined thousands of homes, after which it will come back into the Union, more invulnerable, more arrogant, and more insolent than ever. For the negroes, no hope; for the poor whites, eternal dependence, perpetual debasement; for the rich planters, the intoxication of power and of success.

"And is it imagined that on such conditions the Union will be re-established? That between a humiliated democracy, after so many and such generous efforts, and a triumphant aristocracy, a friendship will spring up which will soon heal all the wounds of war? No! that is the dream of insanity, no one can believe it, except he be blinded by a vain ambition.

"On the day which the North shall subscribe to such conditions, it will be the abdication of her political and social position which she will sign. At the bottom of this new bargain may be written: *The End of America.* The America of Washington will have disappeared from the world, and forever!

"Peace concluded, what will be the attitude of the North towards the South? That of powerlessness and resignation; for in fine, it cannot be glossed over, if the South is yielded to, it is because it could not be overcome; it is that, notwithstanding fine sounding words, the North, in its inmost feelings, acknowledges itself to be conquered.

"If in this respect some illusion should exist at the North, the first newspaper from Europe will suffice to dissipate it. For thirty years Europe has treated the American Democracy disdainfully, because that democracy pattered with slavery. To repel this unjust and interested disdain, the North excused itself on the ground that from love of peace, from respect for the constitution, it resigned itself to a condition it had not made. The excuse was legitimate, it was accepted by the world in good faith. But from the day when slavery shall be triumphantly re-established with the acquiescence of the North; when the chains of the negro shall be rivetted by the very hands which at this moment are breaking them, the North will not escape the terrible accusation of complicity; and then—what joy for the enemies of America and of Liberty! What grief! what shame for all their friends! The great Republic will be dishonored, what matters, it will be said, the opinion of Europe; America re-united cares little for the old continent, perhaps she will soon have some accounts to settle with those who have mocked at her quarrels. Be it so, let us put aside public opinion, although it may be like justice; more easy to brave it in words than to escape its blows. But there is a tribunal which none can fly from—it is conscience. The day when peace shall be signed, what will the North think of itself, how judge itself? I say nothing of the avowal that will come from the South, that will prove that if the North had made a supreme effort, all resistance was at an end and the Union would be established on the principles of Liberty and Equality; but after the first festivals and first rejoicings on peace, what will the falling back on the inward thought be; and then what sadness, what humiliation. How will the truth be felt of that great saying of Franklin: *'Those who to obtain a moment of security, sacrifice liberty, do not deserve to obtain either liberty or security.'* Yes, it will be said, the war was severe, sufferings were extreme, a base currency swallowed up private fortunes, as well as the public wealth, but, in the midst of these miseries, the war was in a sacred cause, blood was offered up for liberty. Religion, the country placed their hopes on us. The ills were great without doubt, but these ills, victory has cured them; with that the Republic has recovered its greatness and its prosperity. But that which a lame peace will never cure, is the leprosy of slavery; that which it will never efface, is that black stain which soils our continent. During four years we rolled upward the rock of Sisyphus; for want of a final effort it has rolled back upon us, and to overwhelm us. Henceforth we must live giving perpetually the lie to the Gospels, by paltering with iniquity, and all this to leave to our children what we received from our fathers, an incurable evil that will destroy the Republic and liberty.

"Disquiets, regrets, remorse, these are all that transaction on which the democrats pride themselves in advance, will give—that transaction which they present as a title to the confidence of an abused people whose suffrages they lay claim to. But that transaction, shameful as it may be for the North, will the South accept it? I venture to say no. If General McClellan gains, that will be his deception and the first chastisement of his party. An aristocracy, not numerous, which holds together, feels its force, and knows how to choose the favorable moment. What would the election of General McClellan show, except that the democracy is tired out, that its efforts are thwarted, that it wishes for peace at any price. All is extreme in democracy, feebleness as well as energy, self-abandonment as well as heroism. A democracy which no longer is willing to war, will accept any conditions except to curse the next day those that lead it astray. It is certain the South will avail itself of this advantage, and will again seize upon, at the first moment, that supremacy which four years of warfare have caused it to lose; or it will not remain in the Union; or, if it re-enter, it

will only be to appearance, and assuming there a position by itself, in proposing, perhaps, the exclusion of New England, or the singular system of two republics, internally independent, but represented abroad by one President. In a word, that sovereignty which is acknowledged by treating with it, the South will maintain, and will make triumphant. The chief of the new Union established on the ruins of the old, in sound justice should be the conqueror. The true President of America, reconstituted by the democrats, is not General McClellan, but is Jefferson Davis.

"Will the American Democracy let itself be again deceived by a party which for thirty years has always led it astray? Has it to such degree desire and thirst for peace that it is ready to sacrifice to it honor, interest, the future of the country? Among this people that for four years has achieved such great things, will the democrats succeed in recruiting a majority to break away from a glorious past, and accept the shame of a bargain? Will it disown those noble soldiers, who, in the midst of their sufferings only ask a continuance of the war? Are they going to turn off Grant, Meade, Sherman, Faragut, to offer to the admiration of America the patriotism of a people resigned in anticipation to the supremacy of the South, or to separation? If that be America, how has she degenerated! In her history she will find other examples and other memories. From 1776 to 1781 what misery did not the insurgents undergo, soldiers without bread and without shoes, a paper currency without value, towns burned, country places set on fire; and still, except a handful of loyalists whom disgrace has followed even to the tomb, who ever proposed to treat with the enemy? The armies of 1864 are neither less brave nor less patriotic than the armies of the war of Independence. Success is almost certain, the victory sure, and in fine we are on the verge of a glorious peace. Is this the moment for the American to listen to men who would propose to them to abdicate their rights?

"No, I will never believe that a generous spirited nation, which already has more than once astonished Europe by its energy and perseverance, should yield miserably to discouragement, when with a last effort it can crush the rebellion. The hope of the enemies of the great Republic shall be foiled. Rejuvenated by victory, refreshed by trials, America will banish slavery from the world, and will set an example still greater than that of the war of Independence. Twice will she have established liberty; political liberty in 1776, civil liberty in 1864. Neither Greece nor Rome have left behind them such great memories.

"An old friend of the United States, the vivacity of my expressions, should not cause surprise. The world is a solidarity, and the cause of America is the cause of Liberty. So long as there shall be across the Atlantic a society of thirty millions of men, living happily and peacefully under a government of their choice, with laws made by themselves, liberty will cast her rays over Europe like an illuminating pharos. America disencumbered of slavery, will be the country of all ardent spirits, of all generous hearts. But should liberty become eclipsed in the new world, it would become night in Europe, and we shall see the work of Washington, of the Franklins, of the Hamiltons, spit upon and trampled under foot by the whole school which believes only in violence and in success.

"Therefore we wait with impatience the result of the presidential election, praying God that the name which shall stand first on the ballot shall be that of honest and upright Abraham Lincoln; for that name will be a presage of victory, the triumph of Justice and of Law. To vote for McClellan is to vote for the humiliation of the North, the perpetual upholding of slavery, the severance of the great republic. To vote for Lincoln, is to vote for Union and for Liberty.

Edward Laboulaye."