

**Winners of the 2009/2010
Hildene Lincoln Essay Competition**

Topic: Horace Greeley's Letter; Why did Lincoln respond?

First Place, \$1,000:

Ciaren Wade of Arlington Memorial High School, Arlington, VT
Teacher: Gayna Cross

Second Place, \$750:

Anna O'Malley of Albert D. Lawton Intermediate School, Essex Junction, VT
Teacher: John Pontius

Third Place, \$500:

Sarabeth Rambold of Manchester Elementary Middle School, Manchester Ctr, VT
Teacher: Kraig Hannum

Honorable Mentions, \$200:

Fatema Boxwala of Albert D. Lawton Intermediate School, Essex Junction, VT
Teacher: John Pontius

Claire Cofelice of Maple Street School, Manchester Center, VT
Teacher: Kimberly Field-Marvin

Will Helmetag of the Long Trail School, Dorset, VT
Teacher: Kim Rizio

Caitlin M. Owen of the Long Trail School, Dorset, VT
Teacher: Deb MacDonald

Gailin Leah Higgins Pease of Windsor High School, Windsor, VT
Teacher: Shannon Hurd

**First Place
Ciaren Wade
Arlington Memorial High School, Arlington, VT**

Executive Mansion,
Washington, November 22, 2009

Hon. Friends of Hildene:

Seven score and seven years ago on August 19th, 1862, I was presented with a letter from Horace Greeley, the highly esteemed editor of the New York Tribune. At a time in which my country was rent by secession, I carried a burden which I could only hope I could withstand. Seeking to advance the abolitionist cause, Mr. Greeley's letter accused me of being "strangely and disastrously remiss" in the leadership of my country and asserted that had I not given "deference to Rebel Slavery," the Rebellion would "have received a staggering if not fatal blow."

My most urgent requirement was to guarantee the survival of a united Nation, no matter the consequence with regard to the colored man. I sought to ensure Mr. Greeley and his readership that I knew the best course for our country. At the time, I could not divulge whether I intended to free all, some, or none of the slaves. Any answer could have caused the secession of the states that had yet to decide for the Union. But even then, my countrymen could not know that my desk already held a draft of the Emancipation Proclamation. This fulfillment of the freedoms granted by our founding documents to all Americans, including the Negro, required appropriate timing and a Union victory in the ongoing Civil War.

I believed, before the slaves were freed, that states currently permitting slavery ought to be permitted to maintain slavery within their borders but no other admitted state should have been allowed to house slavery. Indeed, my ideas of slavery enabled me to have a partially sympathetic but rational opinion toward the emancipation of the

slaves, especially during my earlier confrontational debates with Stephen Douglas. In response to Mr. Greeley, I presented my position similar to the way I responded to Mr. Douglas; that is, as a man whose thinking paralleled that of our forefathers and who believed the spread of slavery into new territories shall be opposed as I anticipated “its ultimate extinction.”

Mr. Greeley could have expected no more from me than truth, honesty, respect and my confidence that I am in the right. But to my nation I am duty bound. The instant I finished reading Mr. Greeley’s letter, I knew this man spoke from a “heart I have always supposed to be right,” and was lending voice to those most cherished beliefs of our founding fathers. A man who could write so passionately about his core beliefs demands my respect. And though I stood accused, I ensured the nation I was strong and firm, steadfast and confident our country would not perish. Our country’s founding documents declare that all men are created equal and I welcome the day that “all men everywhere could be free.” But until the day I presented the Emancipation Proclamation, when victory in our great Civil War was nearly assured, my utmost priority was to preserve the Union.

Yours,

A. Lincoln

Second Place
Anna O'Malley
Albert D. Lawton Intermediate School, Essex Junction, VT

On August 19th, 1862, Horace Greeley, influential founder and editor of the *New York Tribune*, published a strongly-worded editorial addressed to President Abraham Lincoln. Greeley's editorial, titled "The Prayer of the Twenty Millions," complained about Lincoln's inconsistencies and lack of purpose and noted that many of Lincoln's supporters were "greatly disappointed and deeply pained" by his policies regarding slavery. Greeley urged Lincoln and his subordinates to execute the laws "to the letter", in particular the second Confiscation Act, which decreed that the slaves of Confederate officials would be forever free. Greeley also commented that states of the Union with slavery, such as Maryland and Delaware, were, "though under the Union flag, in full sympathy with the rebellion," while free Rebel states were "unconquerably loyal to the Union." Finally, Greeley insisted that Lincoln abolish slavery once and for all, stating, "The Rebellion, if crushed out tomorrow, would return within the year if slavery were left in full vigor."

Less than one week later, the *New York Times*, one of the country's foremost Republican newspapers, published Lincoln's response. Why did the president, facing a divided nation and managing a war, take the time to respond? There were two reasons for Lincoln's letter: first, to restore the public's confidence in him, and second, to prepare the public for his position on emancipation.

Greeley, an eloquent and persuasive writer, helped shape public opinion in the 1850's and 1860's. By the time Greeley published his letter in the popular *Tribune*, abolitionists had long been advocating for the emancipation of all of the slaves, and many people across the Union seemed to agree. Lincoln's supporters were beginning to lose faith, discouraged by his lack of action. If Lincoln had failed to respond to Greeley's letter, he would have given his critics and even his followers more reason to be upset. Lincoln wrote a response to Greeley's message hoping to explain his actions and win back support.

In his assessment of Lincoln a few years after Lincoln's death, Horace Greeley wrote, "Mr. Lincoln's letter had been prepared before he ever saw my 'Prayer.'" Greeley described Lincoln's response as "an opportunity, an occasion, an excuse," for Lincoln

to explain his “altered position changed not by his own volition, but by circumstances fairly before the country.” Lincoln’s response was meant to prepare the public for the Emancipation Proclamation, which the president was already preparing to issue. His letter informed the abolitionists that his main objective was to save the Union, and reminded those in favor of slavery that he was prepared to abolish slavery if, by doing so, he could save the Union. The Emancipation Proclamation, issued on January 1, 1863, granted freedom to about 3,120,000 slaves.

Lincoln knew that the public was not ready to accept the Emancipation Proclamation, and he realized that the people were losing confidence in his actions. Greeley’s letter gave Lincoln an opportunity to prepare the public for emancipation and a chance to win back support.

Third Place
Sarabeth Rambold
Manchester Elementary/Middle School, Manchester, VT

Liberty or Union

On August 19, 1862 Horace Greeley, the *Tribune's* editor, printed a letter to President Lincoln in his newspaper. Greeley complained that the President was "remiss" in failing to "EXECUTE THE LAWS," specifically, the Confiscation Act. Greeley challenged the President to act "now" and emancipate the slaves. Lincoln's reply appeared in the *National Intelligencer* on August 22, 1862.

It is important to know the history of the era when these letters were written to understand the letters. Much happened between Lincoln's election and the Civil War.

1850's political debate focused on the expansion of slavery. The North wanted to end slavery. The South wanted to expand slavery. Lincoln supported laws that curtailed the *expansion* of slavery.

In 1860 Lincoln was elected President. The southern states had already seceded. Lincoln refused to recognize the Confederacy. The Civil War began.

It was first thought that the Civil War would end quickly and the union would be restored. By 1862 it became clear the war would be a long one.

Initially, Union Commanders returned slaves to their masters. This became unreasonable because the southern economy and war effort relied upon slave labor. In 1861 the Confiscation Act was enacted. It authorized the confiscation of confederate property, including slaves. At first, Lincoln opposed the Act fearing it would aggravate Border States.

The war dragged on into 1862. The Union Army had failed to put down the rebellion. The Union won no decisive victories. Casualties were tremendous. It was under these circumstances that the letters were written.

Greeley's letter questioned Lincoln's policies. Greeley demanded that Lincoln "Execute the Laws" (the Confiscation Act). Greeley chastised Lincoln for allowing his Generals to disregard the Act, by returning slaves to their masters and not allowing them into Union ranks. To Greeley this was "as unmilitary as inhuman."

Lincoln's reply left no doubt regarding his policy. It was "SAVE THE UNION." If saving the Union meant ending slavery or continuing slavery he would do it. Lincoln

concluded the policy he pursued was his “Official Duty.” Personally, however, he wished all men to be free.

At that time the war was a stalemate. Lincoln couldn’t jeopardize losing the Border States. Additionally, Lincoln doubted he had Constitutional authority to end slavery. Slavery was a state issue.

Nevertheless when Lincoln penned his reply to Greeley he had already written the Emancipation Proclamation. Lincoln wanted to free the slaves but needed a Union victory. That victory came at Antietam. Lincoln announced the Emancipation Proclamation freeing all slaves in the defeated Confederate States.

The purpose of Lincoln’s reply has been debated. It appears that Greeley with his challenge to Lincoln unknowingly gave Lincoln the platform and opportunity to *softly* announce his new position on emancipation. Lincoln’s reply allowed him to regain the North’s confidence while explaining his policies to the South. Lincoln’s reply to Greeley prepared the country for the Emancipation Proclamation which was soon to follow.

“In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free.” (A. Lincoln 1862).