JUNIOR HISTORIANS

Excerpt from Greeley’s Response to Lincoln,   
August 25, 1862

*On August 19, 1862, Horace Greeley, Editor of the New York Daily Tribune, published an editorial addressed to President Lincoln entitled “The Prayer of Twenty Millions.” In it, he expressed disappointment in Lincoln’s policies and urged him to enforce the Confiscation Acts of 1861 and 1862. Three days later, Lincoln replied to Greeley’s concerns. On August 25, 1862, Greeley published Lincoln’s letter and a reply in the New York Daily Tribune. The three excerpts below are taken from Greeley’s response to Lincoln.*

“Although I did not anticipate nor seek any reply to my former letter unless through your official acts, I thank you for having accorded one, since it enables me to say explicitly that nothing was further from my thought than to impeach in any manner the sincerity or the intensity of your devotion to the saving of the Union. I never doubted, and have no friend who doubts, that you desire, before and above all else, to re-establish the now derided authority and vindicate the territorial integrity of the Republic. I intended only to raise this question—*Do you propose to do this by recognizing, obeying, and enforcing the laws, or by ignoring, disregarding, and in effect defying them?*

I stand upon the law of the land. The humblest has a clear right to invoke its protection and support against even the highest. That law—in strict accordance with the law of Nations, of Nature, and of God—declares that every traitor now engaged in the infernal work of destroying our country has forfeited thereby all claim or color of right lawfully to hold human beings in Slavery. I ask of you a clear and public recognition that this law is to be obeyed wherever the National authority is respected…I ask you to instruct your Generals and Commodores that no loyal person—certainly none willing to render service to the National cause—is henceforth to be regarded as the slave of any traitor.”

“Mr. President, I beseech you, to open your eyes to the fact that the devotees of Slavery everywhere—just as much in Maryland as in Mississippi, in Washington as in Richmond—are to-day your enemies, and the implacable foes of every effort to reestablish the National authority by the discomfiture of its assailants.”

“That you may not unseasonably perceive these vital truths as they will shine forth on the pages of History—that they may be read by our children irradiated by the glory of our National salvation, not rendered lurid by the blood-red glow of National conflagration and ruin—that you may promptly and practically realize that Slavery is to be vanquished only by Liberty—is the fervent and anxious prayer of Yours truly, HORACE GREELEY.”



JUNIOR HISTORIANS

Greeley’s Response to Lincoln, August 25, 1862  
New York Daily Tribune

Transcript

Dear Sir:

Although I did not anticipate nor seek any reply to my former letter unless through your official acts, I thank you for having accorded one, since it enables me to say explicitly that nothing was further from my thought than to impeach in any manner the sincerity or the intensity of your devotion to the saving of the Union. I never doubted, and have no friend who doubts, that you desire, before and above all else, to re-establish the now derided authority and vindicate the territorial integrity of the Republic. I intended only to raise this question—*Do you propose to do this by recognizing, obeying, and enforcing the laws, or by ignoring, disregarding, and in effect defying them?*

I stand upon the law of the land. The humblest has a clear right to invoke its protection and support against even the highest. That law—in strict accordance with the law of Nations, of Nature, and of God—declares that every traitor now engaged in the infernal work of destroying our country has forfeited thereby all claim or color of right lawfully to hold human beings in Slavery. I ask of you a clear and public recognition that this law is to be obeyed wherever the National authority is respected. I cite to you, instances wherein men fleeing from bondage to traitors to the protection of our flag have been assaulted, wounded and murdered by soldiers of the Union—unpunished and unrebuked by your General Commanding—to prove that it is your duty to take action in the premises—action that will cause the law to be proclaimed and obeyed wherever your authority or that of the Union is recognized as paramount. The Rebellion is strengthened, the National cause is imperiled, by every hour’s delay to strike Treason this staggering blow.

When Fremont proclaimed Freedom to the slaves of Rebels, you constrained him to modify his proclamation into rigid accordance with the terms of the existing law. It was your clear right to do so. I now ask of you conformity to the principle so sternly enforced upon him. I ask you to instruct your Generals and Commodores that no loyal person—certainly none willing to render service to the National cause—is henceforth to be regarded as the slave of any traitor. While no rightful Government was ever before assailed by so wanton and wicked a rebellion as that of the slaveholders against our National life, I am sure none ever before hesitated at so simple and primary an act of self-defense as to relieve those who would serve and save it from chattel servitude to those who are wading through seas of blood to subvert and destroy it. Future generations will with difficulty realize that there could have been hesitation on this point. Sixty years of general and boundless subserviency to the Slave Power do not adequately explain it.

Mr. President, I beseech you, to open your eyes to the fact that the devotees of Slavery everywhere—just as much in Maryland as in Mississippi, in Washington as in Richmond—are to-day your enemies, and the implacable foes of every effort to reestablish the National authority by the discomfiture of its assailants. Their president is not Abraham Lincoln but Jefferson Davis. You may draft them to serve in the war; but they will only fight under the Rebel flag. There is not in New-York to-day a man who really believes in Slavery, loves it, and desires its perpetuation, who heartily desires the crushing out of the Rebellion. He would much rather save the Republic by buying up and and pensioning off its assailants. His “Union as it was” is a Union of which you were not President, and no one who truly wished Freedom to All ever could be.

If these are truths, Mr. President, they are surely of the gravest importance. You cannot safely approach the great and good end you so intently meditate by shutting your eyes to them. Your deadly foe is not blinded by any mist in which *your* eyes may be enveloped. He walks straight to his goal, knowing well his weak point, and most unwillingly betraying his fear that you too may see and take advantage of it. God grant that his apprehension may prove prophetic.

That you may not unseasonably perceive these vital truths as they will shine forth on the pages of History—that they may be read by our children irradiated by the glory of our National salvation, not rendered lurid by the blood-red glow of National conflagration and ruin—that you may promptly and practically realize that Slavery is to be vanquished only by Liberty—is the fervent and anxious prayer of

Yours truly,

HORACE GREELEY

