JUNIOR HISTORIANS

Lincoln’s Response to Horace Greeley’s The Prayer of Twenty Millions, August 22, 1862

Transcript

*On August 19, 1862, Horace Greeley, Editor of the New York Daily Tribune, published an editorial, addressed to President Lincoln and entitled “The Prayer of Twenty Millions.” In the editorial, Greeley called for Lincoln to enforce the Confiscation Acts of 1861 and 1862. The editorial also included nine specific demands of Lincoln. Three days later, Lincoln responded, publishing the following letter to Greeley in a rival newspaper.*

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Executive Mansion,

Washington, August 22, , 1862.

Hon. Horace Greely:

Dear Sir:

 I have just read yours of the 19th addressed to myself through the New-York Tribune. If there be in it any statements, or assumptions of fact, which I may know to be erroneous, I do not, now and here, controvert them. If there be in it any inferences which I may believe to be falsely drawn, I do not now and here, argue against them. If there be in it any inferences which I may believe to be falsely drawn, I do not now and here, argue against them. If there be perceptable in it an impatient and dictatorial tone, I waive it in deference to an old friend, whose heart I have always supposed to be right.

 As to the policy I "seem to be pursuing" as you say, I have not meant to leave any one in doubt.

I would save the Union. I would save it the shortest way under the constitution. The

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sooner the national authority can be restored, the nearer the Union will be "the Union as it was." ~~Broken eggs can never be mended, and the longer the breaking proceeds, the more will be broken.~~ If there be those ~~any~~ who would not save the Union, unless they could at the same time save slavery, I do not agree with them. If there be ~~any~~ those who would not save the Union unless they could at the same time destroy slavery, I do not agree with them.

 My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do, it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union;

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and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would keep help to save the Union. I shall do less whenever I shall believe what I am doing hurts the cause, and I shall do more whenever I shall believe doing more will help the cause. I shall try to correct errors when shown to be errors; and I shall adopt new views so fast as they shall appear to be true views.

 I have here stated my purpose according to my view of official duty; and I intend no modification of my oft-expressed personal wish that all men everywhere could be free.

Yours,

A. Lincoln

