



## Lincoln and Compensated Emancipation in Kentucky

On March 6, 1862, Abraham Lincoln introduced a bold and far-reaching proposal to Congress, suggesting that compensated emancipation be offered to border state slaveholders if they were to adopt "gradual abolishment of slavery." If pursued, Lincoln argued, compensated emancipation would ultimately end the war, as the Confederacy would lose all prospects for securing the allegiance of Kentucky and the other border states.

The majority of border state congressmen, however, rejected the proposal.

"The undersigned Representatives of Kentucky, Virginia, Missouri, Tennessee, Delaware, and Maryland in the two houses of Congress have listened to your address," they noted. Although the

group repudiated the "dangerous heresies of the Secessionists," they challenged the practicality of the proposed legislation, claiming there was not "the remotest possibility that the States we represent would join in the rebellion." Furthermore, they argued, compensated emancipation would result in "a radical change of our social system." The right to hold slaves was "a right appertaining to all the states," which could "cherish or abolish the institution" at their own discretion.

On January 1, 1863, Lincoln issued his Emancipation Proclamation. That measure, combined with the 1865 ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment, ended slavery in America. No compensation was offered to slaveholders in the Confederate states or the loyal border states such as Kentucky.

The uncompensated emancipation of slaves contributed to mixed feelings about Lincoln in Kentucky lasting well into the twentieth century.

Through its signature exhibition, *Beyond the Log Cabin: Kentucky's Abraham Lincoln*, the Kentucky Historical Society is now exploring the complex relationship between Abraham Lincoln and his native state. *Beyond the Log Cabin: Kentucky's Abraham Lincoln* is on display through June 9, 2009, at the Thomas D. Clark Center for Kentucky History in Frankfort.

Abraham Lincoln and his Emancipation Proclamation, The Strobridge Lith. Co., ca. 1888  
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