

Lincoln to George Robertson, August 15, 1855

...On the question of liberty, as a principle, we are not what we have been. When we were the political slaves of King George, and wanted to be free, we called the maxim that “all men are created equal” a self evident truth; but now when we have grown fat, and have lost all dread of being slaves ourselves, we have become so greedy to be masters that we call the same maxim “a self evident lie.” The fourth of July has not quite dwindled away; it is still a great day—for burning fire-crackers!!!

That spirit which desired the peaceful extinction of slavery, has itself become extinct, with the occasion, and the men of the Revolution. Under the impulse of that occasion, nearly half the states adopted systems of emancipation at once; and it is a significant fact, that not a single state has

done the like since. So far as peaceful, voluntary emancipation is concerned, the condition of the negro slave in America, scarcely less terrible to the contemplation of a free mind, is now as fixed, and hopeless of change for the better, as that of the lost souls of the finally impenitent. The Autocrat of all the Russias will resign his crown, and proclaim his subjects free republicans sooner than will our American masters voluntarily give up their slaves.

Our political problem now is “Can we, as a nation, continue together permanently—forever—half slave, and half free?” The problem is too mighty for me. May God, in his mercy, superintend the solution.

Your much obliged friend, and humble servant

A. Lincoln

From future Lincoln ... in the 1858 “House Divided” speech: *I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other.*

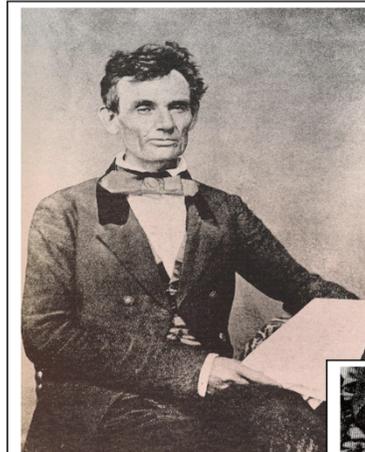


Fig. 1 Abraham Lincoln in 1854
(Chicago, Polycarpus von Schneidau)

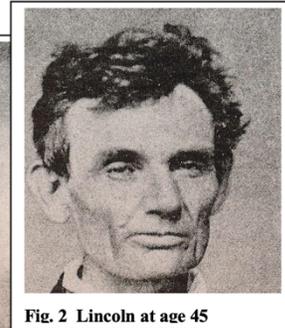


Fig. 2 Lincoln at age 45

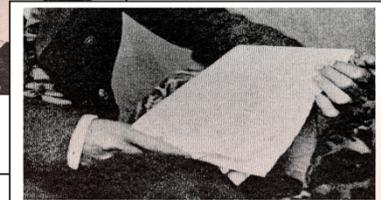


Fig. 3 Holding a copy of the *Chicago Democrat*